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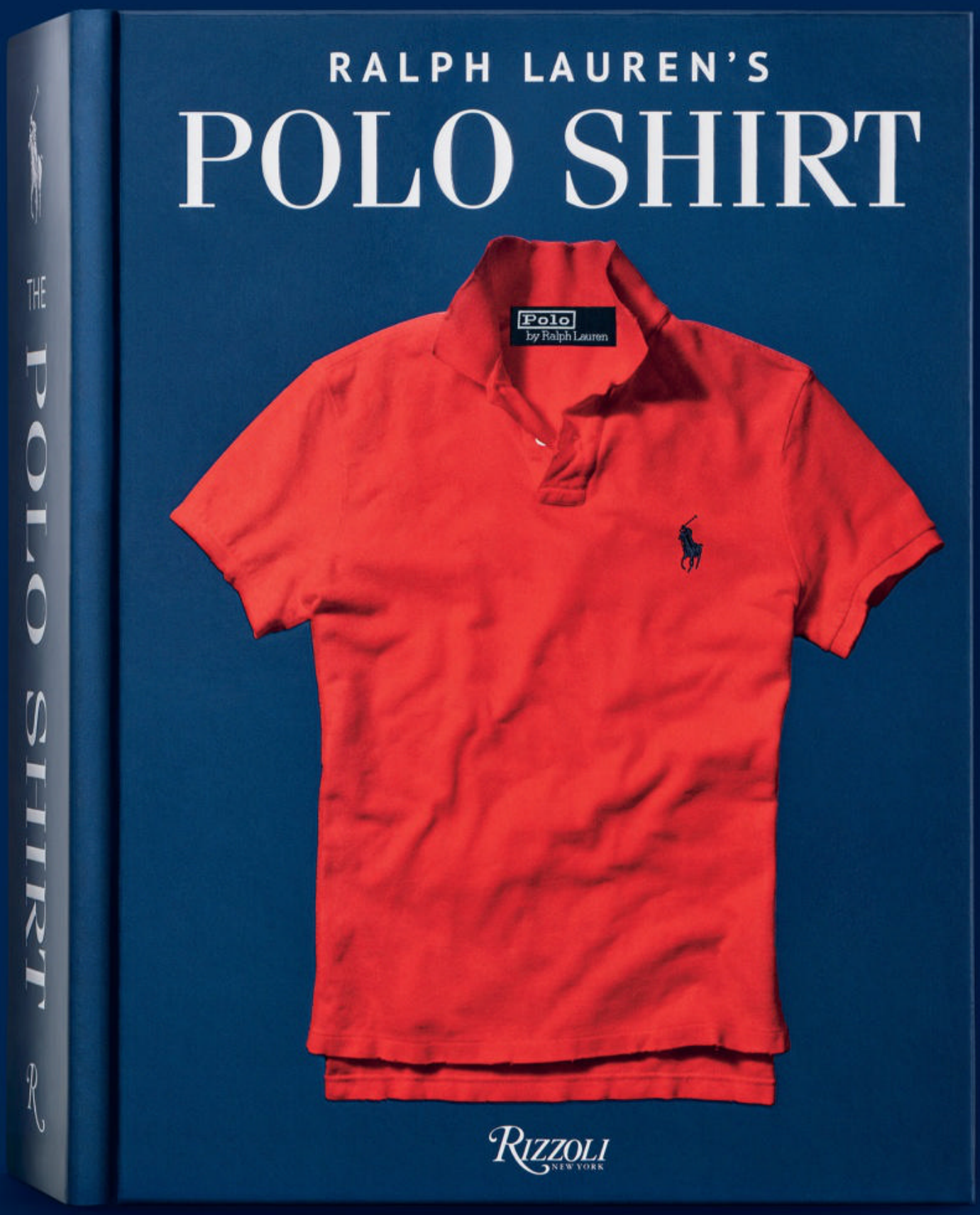

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THIS PAGE: T-SHIRT AND TROUSERS, **CELINE BY HEDI SLIMANE;** VINTAGE BOOTS AVAILABLE AT **STOCK VINTAGE, NYC.**

RUVEN AFANADOR

ON THE COVER

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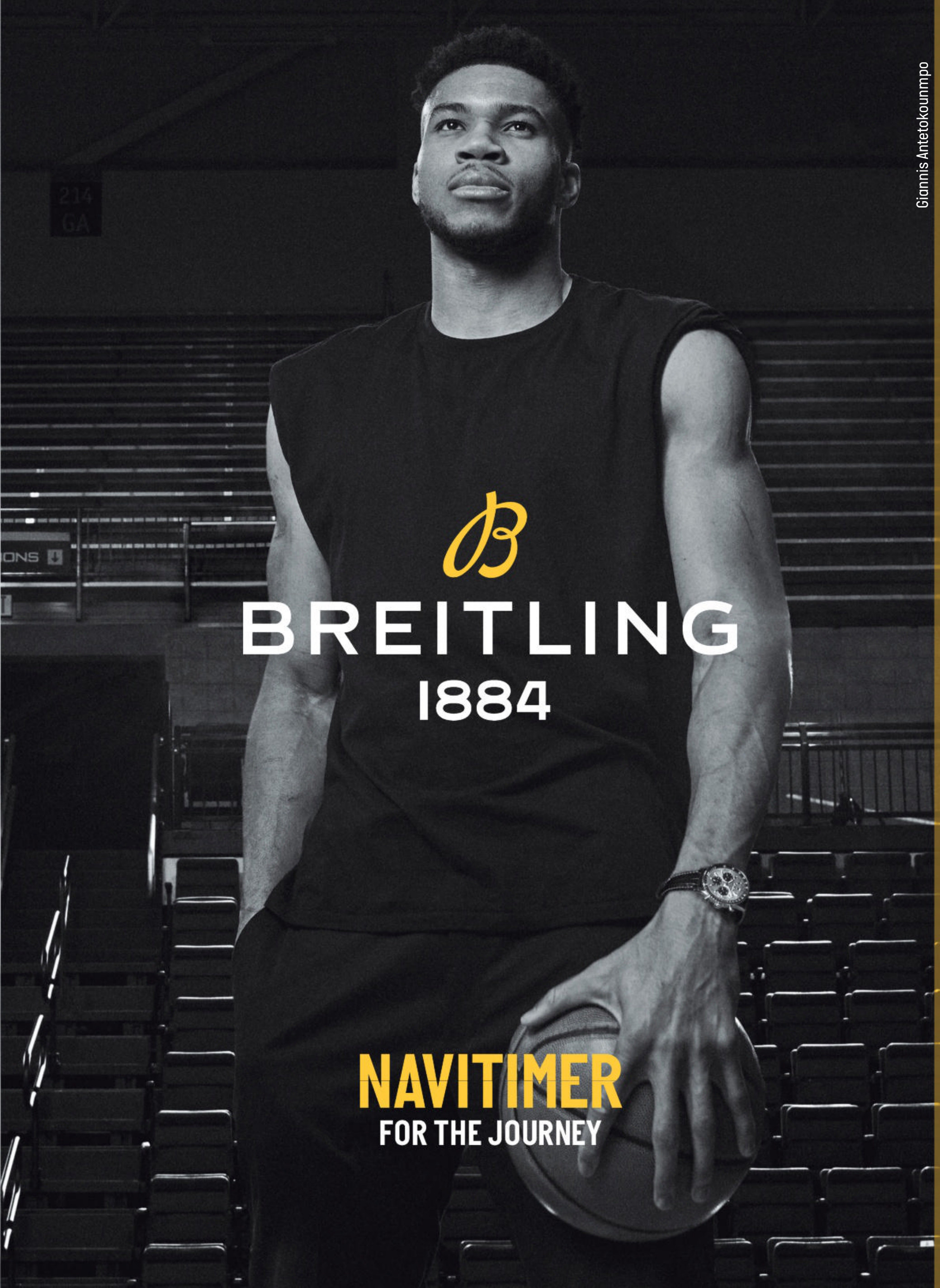
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An Esquire Man

ELLIOT PAGE SHOWED UP AT THE ESQUIRE OFFICES THE WAY MOST famous people would on a Thursday afternoon in New York: discreetly. Black T-shirt. Jeans. Baseball cap pulled low. As he passed my office, I looked up from my Zoom meeting and said to the person on the screen, "I think Elliot Page just walked by."

This wasn't a random pop-in. He was here for a fitting. The following day, we would be photographing Page for the 1,064th cover of Esquire, so he spent the next hour with stylist Bill Mullen and Esquire's fashion department, trying on some very expensive clothes.

The fitting marked the penultimate step in the lengthy process of executing an Esquire cover shoot. The process begins in earnest with a question: Who should be on the cover? In its eighty-nine years, Esquire has featured on its cover a dozen U.S. presidents; countless world-famous athletes, actors, and musicians; and Truman Capote—three times. We don't make the decision lightly. Who's creating work and making noise in ways that amaze us? Who meets the cultural moment? The person we're looking for—we call him an Esquire Man.

Finding him requires multiple conversations with Esquire's senior staff, starting with executive director of talent Randi Peck, who tracks celebrities and determines who best reflects the brand and is likely to make the greatest impact. (She's usually correct.) Then we weigh the options—an intense, deeply unscientific process that can take weeks, even months. Once we reach something like a consensus, our creative team gets to work, developing a concept for the photo shoot. What mood are we going for? What do we want to say with this cover? Which photographer will help us achieve it?

For Page, the inspiration we came up with was young Hollywood. James Dean in the fifties. Richard Gere in the eighties. River Phoenix and Leo DiCaprio a decade later. Rockwell Harwood, Esquire's design director, describes it as being a fly on the wall at a place like the Viper Room in the nineties, "being around these men who were given an opportunity to explore their versions of masculinity. For Elliot, it was giving him a character and a narrative to play with." The fashion followed. According to Harwood, the vibe was "You don't give a shit, but you do give a shit."

As always, the goal was to create a cover image that is nothing short of iconic.

Elliot Page is an icon. He earned an Academy Award nomination at twenty, for *Juno;* has starred in big-budget hits as well as indie darlings; came out as queer in 2014; made the riveting Viceland show *Gaycation;* and, in December 2020, revealed that he is transgender. With his starring role on the Netflix blockbuster *The Umbrella Academy,* Page is playing a trans superhero. Read his story, told in the style of Esquire's long-running franchise What I've Learned, on page 64.

At the cover shoot, I joined Harwood and contributing visual director James Morris beside the monitor as photographer Ruven Afanador guided Page through the poses; Mullen jumped on set between shots to tweak the clothes. As images of Page flashed on the screen, we exchanged glances but didn't say a word. We shared a tacit understanding: Something special was happening. Page brought an ease to wearing the clothes and an undeniable, intense confidence to the camera. He, Afanador, and Mullen were in a groove. They blew past the designated lunch hour.

I didn't want to disrupt the flow, but in between looks, as Page strode from the dressing area back to the set, I spoke to him briefly, sharing what had been clear to all of us: He looked iconic. An Esquire Man.

—Michael Sebastian

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JENNIFER LIVINGSTON

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The Strong, Silent Type Will Not Shut Up

My dad's chair, of all things, might be the secret to our culture-wide freak-out about men

MY DAD HAD ONE OF THOSE BIG CHAIRS. Oxblood leatherette, brass-tack trim, an ottoman for the feet and a wingback for the head. A piece a decorator would call masculine. A chair for reading three paragraphs of a book and then immediately napping. A Dad Chair. It was the one thing I wanted from Mom and Dad's place in St. Louis when we cleared it out last Christmas. I found a guy who was moving cross-country and paid him $400 to drive it from St. Louis to L. A.

Dad was part of the Silent Generation, born be-

tween the world wars. He was a Marine, a devout Catholic, a man who wore a necktie to a serious office full of serious chairs. He got himself a proper office job in the '50s and then started his own business. That business was successful enough for us to move into bigger and bigger houses, eventually one large enough for his own office and his own chair.

Dad and my brothers—boomers, both of them—had an ease with one another, a fluency in the language of sports and the stock market, and because I am so out of my depth in this department I cannot think of a third guy thing; let's say escrow. In the context of my family, "the boys" still means the three of them. My brothers took over the family business, and because they are smart and hard-working and know what things like escrow are, they've grown it into something bigger. That's how they've supported their families and built their own houses with their own Dad Chairs.

I'm one of those Generation X boys who listened to the Smiths and liked to be in plays. Dad knew he had a different kind of boy on his hands. Because *Andy Griffith Show* reruns taught me that fishing was a critical element in a father-and-son relationship, I once told my dad: "I don't know why we don't fish. We should fish."

"Do . . . you want to fish?" he asked.

I thought about it for a second or two and said, "Oh, God, no," and we laughed.

If we struggled sometimes to find things to talk about, that just meant more time to be quiet together. A lull in the conversation can feel like a failure when you're talkers like us, in a family of talkers like ours, but sometimes it isn't. Sometimes it's just comfort. Acceptance.

My father died on New Year's Eve 2016. I miss him every single day, but I'm actually a little relieved he did not live to see what's happening to men now. Not how men are changing—from shouldering more of the work at home to challenging gender norms—but how many of them are reacting to these changes. I write this in a moment when there's a "Tucker Carlson Original" called *The End of Men,* featuring a practice called "testicle tanning." It blasts your balls with red light—it's been right in front of us this whole time!—to allegedly boost testosterone, which, I guess, increases your appetite for sports talk radio, gay jokes, and premature heart disease. Joe Rogan sneered when Pete Buttigieg took paternity leave: "Isn't that supposed to be for the person who gave birth?" Missouri senator Josh Hawley has said he plans to make masculinity a signature political issue. "A man is a father. A man is a husband. A man is somebody who takes responsibility," said the guy who pumped his fist at the insurrectionist crowd on January 6 yet refuses to accept any responsibility for inciting them.

WE ARE IN THE THROES OF A CULTURE-WIDE freak-out over what is and is not masculine. You may have noticed that many of us are not taking it well. In fact, can someone please check on David Mamet? The tough guys are claiming victimhood; the men who mock you for talking about your feelings are yelling about theirs. The strong, silent type simply will not shut up. *The New York Times* did a roundtable with conservative men this spring, one of whom complained that America is too weak; another said he's personally affronted when he sees a man in insufficiently masculine clothing. It's weird in here right now, and it has been since at least a few months before a news network told guys to sunburn their sacks so they don't end up like me.

We live in a nation of talkers, braggers, yellers, and criers. When our best idea is to irradiate our scrotums to keep us mean, maybe it's worth being quiet for a while. Standing in the way of evolution does not make anyone a man. It doesn't make them a woman, either. It makes them a child.

The chair arrived last month. The guy carried it to the front porch, shook my hand, and drove off, leaving my boyfriend, Ben, and me to bring it into the house. It wouldn't fit through the front door. We had to go the back way, through the carport, in through the double doors, up over my desk, and into the corner I'd cleared out for it. It's too big for the space. I have to hurdle the ottoman so I can get behind my desk. It belongs in a very serious man's office, so it sticks out in here, underneath the framed ads for new-wave records.

The dissonance is what makes it beautiful. The old can peacefully, even beautifully, exist among the new. And the three of us, my brothers and I, traditional and masculine or not, all still get to be our father's sons.

My father's chair arrived this spring. It belongs in a very serious man's office, so it sticks out in mine.

COURTESY DAVE HOLMES (CHAIR). GETTY IMAGES (SKY). NORIKO SATO (COLLAGE).

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YOUR OWN PRIVATE NATIONAL PARK

It'll take a long road trip . . . and a long boat ride. But once you're there, Isle Royale, one of the least visited national parks, delivers a new world.

BY ABIGAIL COVINGTON

YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK—IT'S A stunner. But let's be honest: It's the Times Square of national parks. Last year, more than 4 million people visited the park. If communing with German tourists—lots of them—is what you seek, then go to Yellowstone this summer. (That's assuming you can even score a campsite; last year they sold out months in advance.) If you prefer to commune with nature, then have we got the place for you: one of the least visited national parks in America, an island that saw just 25,000 visitors in 2021, a locale so remote you're guaranteed to never see a German tour bus.

This place is called Isle Royale.

The 50-mile-long island sits on the northern rim of Lake Superior. There is no WiFi, and cell service is spotty. Cars aren't allowed, nor are bikes. Getting there is arduous. You will road-trip through either the hinterlands of Minnesota or Michigan's sparsely populated Upper Peninsula before ditching your car on the mainland and settling in for a bumpy ferry ride across America's largest body of freshwater, a trip that can last 90 minutes to six hours, depending on where you catch it and where you hop off. You could hire a seaplane for a faster trip—if you've got the stomach for turbulence.

But once you step onto its crisp, pebbled shoreline, Isle Royale's unspoiled splendor sharpens into focus. Verdant spruce trees shoot out of the island's ancient ridges and cascade down toward the water, where you might spot a moose enjoying a dip. There will be northern lights in the summer if conditions are right. And the park has more than 150 miles of hiking trails, canoes to rent, and 36 campgrounds (though a lodge and cabins are also available).

So leave Yellowstone for everyone else. You've got moose. And sweet solitude.

From top: Simple accommodations; the northern lights; Rock Harbor lighthouse; boats available to help you explore; one of the island's many hiking trails; a moose dining on water plants.

JONATHAN IRISH

NEW BOOKS FOR THE TRIP

THE GOTTI WARS, by John Gleeson

In this electrifying memoir, a prosecutor tells the story of how he brought John Gotti to justice, which took down five major mob families and put him in the crosshairs of organized crime. *May 3*

CULT CLASSIC, by Sloane Crosley

Crosley brings her gifts as a humorist to this crackling novel about a start-up hawking romantic closure. When one woman signs up to reconnect with her former flames, she learns bittersweet truths about love in the age of the smartphone. *June 7*

TRACY FLICK CAN'T WIN, by Tom Perrotta

The heroine of *Election* (played in the film by Reese Witherspoon) is back as a middle-aged assistant principal angling for the top job. Tracy's second act delivers acerbic insight about frustrated ambition. *June 7*

HOW TO RAISE AN ANTIRACIST, by Ibram X. Kendi

One of our foremost public intellectuals returns with a visionary call not to childproof our discussions about race. In this questioning memoir, Kendi illuminates how anti-racism can make a safer world. *June 14*

—Adrienne Westenfeld

Got to Get Your Z

The Nissan Z, one of the first affordable two-seat sports cars, is back. And you can buy it in a manual. But with all things going electric and the market for approachable speedsters shrinking, will this be the last of its kind?

BY KEVIN SINTUMUANG

ASK A TODDLER TO DRAW A FAST CAR AND CHANCES ARE THEY'LL INSTINCTIVELY DRAW the silhouette of the Nissan Z. But will they know what a sports car is by the time they get their driver's permit? Will they ever experience the dumb fun of ripping doughnuts in a strip-mall parking lot? Or just driving aimlessly on a Sunday? These joys are rapidly being left in the dust with the advent of electric cars, which can be quick and efficient but, for the most part, lack the drama and open-road emotion of the increasingly rare affordable two-seat sports car. There is the Miata, the Toyota 86, and, for more than 50 years, the Nissan Z.

Since 1970, 1.8 million Z's have been sold worldwide. Before the dominance of the crossover SUV, generations of drivers saw it as the sports car for the everyman, a weekend-joyride machine. The perfect first second car. The newest version continues that tradition by starting at around $40,000 and overdelivering. Its twin-turbo V-6 cranks out a burbling 400 horsepower. Normally, to get that kind of power in a two-seater, you're spending more than $60K on the latest Corvette. On the track and on the desert roads around Nevada's Lake Mead, the Z flaunts its balanced tossability and a launch control that gives you a modicum of rear-wheel-squelching drama without making you feel like human ammo in a slingshot.

It is also the best-looking car at this price point, period. With its restrained design—just get a load of its svelte lines and that boldly minimal grill of rounded rectangles—it's likely the only new affordable car that history will look favorably upon.

Ride sharing. Autonomous driving. Electric cars. Vehicles, especially among young folk, are increasingly seen as transport. Which is why the Z—a car that will be available in a manual or a nine-speed automatic and has no plans to be electrified—demands attention. Car designers, and everyone else who can reach the gas pedal, take note: Timeless design and fun should and can be for everyone.

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100 Years of Attitude

Loll Designs' Adirondack chair perfects a piece of furniture that's been almost perfect for more than a century

—

BY DANIEL DUMAS

IMAGINE THIS: YOU HAVE AN ICE-COLD BEER IN ONE HAND, YOUR PHONE is not in the other hand, and the only thing left on your to-do list is to absorb the sounds of warm twilight. The ideal place to experience this ideal moment is in the most ideal piece of American furniture: the Adirondack chair.

Slung low to the ground with an angled seat and constructed from a few wide, flat slats, the Adirondack hasn't changed much since its invention in 1903 by Thomas Lee. A law-school dropout turned furniture maker, Lee wanted to create an uncomplicated chair comfortable enough to lounge in but hardy enough to be plunked down on the side of a hill. It was a weird design for the time, when overwrought Victorian furniture was the norm. Today, Lee's early chairs sell for nearly $10,000.

How does a modern furniture maker update a flawless design? If you're Loll Designs, you make little improvements that add up in a big way. Swap wooden materials for weather-resistant, high-density polyethylene (aka recycled milk jugs). Add flourishes like the stainless-steel bottle opener underneath the right arm. Make the thing weigh 50 pounds so that it feels sturdy and won't get blown around in a windstorm. Produce it in the U. S. A. and charge a fair price.

Buy one (or two) and own it forever. Now enjoy that beer.

From $695 (tall version shown here, $895); lolldesigns.com

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMIE CHUNG

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HOPE SINGS

After Covid wiped clear its concert calendar and a creative shift forced its members to abandon plans for an art-pop record, Wilco is back with a brand-new album—the rootsy *Cruel Country,* out now—and frontman Jeff Tweedy's got a whole new outlook on life

BY DAN SINKER

IT'S A SUNNY DAY, AND I'M CRYING AS WILCO'S "DARKNESS IS CHEAP," A TRACK off the stalwart indie band's new album, *Cruel Country,* plays on a crappy Bluetooth speaker on the dining-room table that doubles as my desk. There are birds outside fighting at the feeder, and the sky is blue after days of rain and the endless gray that defined spring in Chicago this year. Frontman Jeff Tweedy's brittle voice fills gaps between the sparse instrumentation. A horn, a piano, a guitar. It's beautiful and sad in the way so many things are nowadays. Before I realize it, tears are rolling down my cheeks.

It's been a long few years. For me, for you, for Jeff Tweedy.

Amid the crushing isolation of the pandemic, divisive politics, and a creeping sense of powerlessness over it all, it was easy to feel lost and alone. As Tweedy, 54, sings elsewhere on the album, "It's hard to watch nothing change." This wasn't the first time he felt adrift, and it probably won't be the last. But the past few years altered him, he says, in a way that feels new. Good, even. "During this period of deprivation," Tweedy says, "it occurred to me that making music is really everybody trying to figure out how to have more good days than fucking bad days."

Tweedy knows bad days. The beating heart of Wilco, he has publicly struggled with addiction and anxiety, depression and debilitating migraines. Migraines so bad that when he was a boy, he'd vomit dozens of times in a night from the pain, regularly landing in the hospital for dehydration. A Vicodin habit to numb the discomfort came later—on tour in 2004, he'd pass out in the bathtub, thinking he might not wake up. Rehab kicked the pills, but the migraines still rage. He had one this morning, pushing our conversation back by hours.

He knows good days, too. "I feel very blessed to have been put in a position to tour around the world and make records and play music for people," he says. "It's just a miracle." Wilco attracts a fan obsession once reserved for groups like the Grateful Dead, leading to a level of success that few indie acts enjoy. The band has performed on every late-night show you've heard of and plenty you haven't. Tweedy sang a song for Li'l Sebastian, the legendary mini horse, on *Parks and Recreation,* as well as the theme song on a recent episode of *Ted Lasso*. (A decade ago, as a prank, he even sang the Black Eyed Peas at my book-release party, a fact "I've had a very, very tough time living down," he tells me, laughing.)

But mostly Tweedy knows the balance between the good days and bad. How they even out to form a life. "I have felt really, really hopeless at times, and I have learned there are really subtle, simple joys around the corner at almost any given moment," he says over the phone—while folding laundry, he admits sheepishly—from his home in Chicago.

He's been there—home, that is—a lot recently. Wilco has always been a workhorse band, on the road seemingly more than off. The period of time between Covid wiping out its entire slate of dates in March 2020 and the group picking up again with Sleater-Kinney in August 2021 was the longest Tweedy had stayed put in decades. As the first weird weeks of the pandemic began, his wife, Susie, wanted to do something to reconnect him with the band's dedicated following. "I think she just wanted to make sure they were okay," he says. Together with their sons, Spencer, 26, and Sammy, 22, they began livestreaming on Instagram.

The Tweedy Show, as they dubbed it, felt like a home movie. Unpolished and intimate, it was a father and his sons singing together, Susie cracking wise behind the camera. Occasionally someone would get annoyed. It was hesitant and halting and felt a little like something you shouldn't be seeing, but at a time when you were alone, it also felt reassuring. Everyone was doing the best they could.

Around 200 shows straddled "an unbelievable moment in time where there were no stages and there was really a dismantled hierarchy," Tweedy says. "There were no stars; there were no amateurs or pros. We were all looking for that connection that we didn't have anymore, and everybody was a little scared." Singing songs helped the Tweedys cope, offering a similar salve to those watching.

It unlocked something else within the singer: the simpler folk and country arrangements that underpinned much of his writing with his first band, Uncle Tupelo, and the early Wilco

SAMMY TWEEDY (TWEEDY). JAMIE KELTER DAVIS (WILCO).

When Wilco returned to the studio after a pandemic-induced pause, "there was an urgency, a desire," Jeff Tweedy says, "to have a song to sing together."

albums, sounds he long ago swapped for wilder, weirder fare. "It was like a comfort food to really just focus my writing within those narrower limitations," he says. "It's hard to think of new shapes for a song when the ground is shifting so dramatically." Some of the tracks he wrote appeared on his October 2020 solo album, *Love Is the King,* but they kept "piling up," even after that release.

Wilco had been working on an art-pop album, a departure in sound for the band, in an attempt to "make a new shape and surprise yourself." That work inched along from a distance as Covid spread, but once the band felt safe enough to be in the recording studio together, "none of that material felt grounded enough," Tweedy says. He broke out the piles of rootsier material. "There was an urgency, a desire," he says, "to have a song to sing together."

So they sang.

Those moments became *Cruel Country,* a double album conceived, recorded, and released in just four months, a blink of an eye for a band of Wilco's stature. Each track was recorded live in the studio, the full band playing together. The outfit hadn't recorded that way since 2007's *Sky Blue Sky,* but being in a room with one another, after being apart for so long, felt right. Emotional. As Tweedy says, "All the takes we ended up picking are the ones that just have this thing that you can't really say exactly what it is. They sound like a moment that you want to share with people."

Cruel Country is about America—"What else is there to think about?"—and it's as big and sprawling as the place that inspired it. The promise and problems of this land, the contradictions at its core, cover the album like dust. "I love my country," Tweedy sings on the title track, "stupid and cruel." But there's a hope embedded in it—he describes it as "working from dark to light"—a belief that even in the hard times we've all been through, joy is still possible.

It's not just a hope found on the record but one that Tweedy sees stretched across his whole life now. "Even in my worst moments," he says, "the world would unfold into some kind of crazy joyous day, and I don't think that's an aberration."

So yeah, it's been a long few years. We've lost people we love, lost our jobs, lost ourselves. But we're here now. The sun is out. There's joy to be found every day. And maybe there's a song we can sing, our voices joining in chorus like they used to, singing of dreams and hopes that could still come to pass. Singing a song together.

The Power of the Polo

The Ralph Lauren classic is turning 50 this year. It's time to celebrate an icon.

BY JONATHAN EVANS

POLO SHIRT ($95) BY **POLO RALPH LAUREN;** JEANS ($295) BY **GLENN'S DENIM.**

THE POLO SHIRT IS A GENUINE CLASSIC. THEREIN LIES THE RUB. LIKE OTHER CLASSICS—THE SUIT, THE WHITE OXFORD shirt, the chino—it tends to step out of the spotlight from time to time. That's okay. Unlike flashy, fleeting trends, the polo deals in simplicity and staying power. It's playing the long game. That's why Ralph Lauren's take on the style is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. And all these years later, the polo remains a foundational garment that is adaptable. You can button it to the top and pair it with cropped trousers and big, badass shades. Toss it on with thrashed jeans and suede mules. Layer it under a blazer. However you wear it, the trick is remembering that even if it's not angling for every last bit of attention, the polo is still a star.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RYAN SLACK

STYLING: ALFONSO FERNÁNDEZ NAVAS. GROOMING: JESSICA ORTIZ USING PLEASING. MODEL: JUSTIN FUENTES FOR NEW YORK MODEL MANAGEMENT.

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SPB143 The 1965 Diver's Modern Re-interpretation 6R Automatic Mechanical Movement 70 hours Power Reserve

The OG Calculator Watch

Breitling's Navitimer was a hit with pilots thanks to a built-in slide rule. A new 70th-anniversary edition pays homage to those early days—and introduces a few modern refinements.

BY NICK SULLIVAN

NAVITIMER B01 CHRONOGRAPH 43MM ($9,100) BY **BREITLING;** RINGS, MODEL'S OWN.

FEW PEOPLE KNOW WHAT A SLIDE RULE IS these days. Fewer still know how to use one. But when the Breitling Navitimer debuted in 1952, it was a built-in slide rule—the most recognizable and unique function of the watch—that defined its early success with professional and amateur pilots. They used it to calculate speed and distance on the hop as well as to track fuel consumption. Thanks in no small part to those aviators, the Navitimer is a bona fide icon. To celebrate its 70th anniversary this year, Breitling introduced a new family of Navitimers, with the slide rule front and center.

There are three sizes of the B01 chronograph—41mm, 43mm, and 46mm—all with the hallmarks of the original design, including the distinctive triple subdials. And they come in a range of dial colors. In addition to more standard options like black and silver, plus one very nice copper sunray dial, each size features a slightly different shade of blue or green. There's mint on the 43mm, for instance, and something closer to grass on the 46mm version. Options abound.

While color is one of the more obvious innovations, subtle tweaks—a combination of polished and brushed surfaces, a flatter slide-rule element, and a domed crystal among them—give the watch a more modern look than that of its predecessors. Also modernized is the in-house, automatic movement, with a power reserve of 70 hours.

One more thing about that slide rule: It's simpler than it looks. Two logarithmic scales around the outside edge of the dial, one fixed and the other bidirectional, can perform calculations for tasks as vital as navigating a plane across continents or as mundane as determining a tip on a restaurant bill. Not that you would use them, of course, when your phone can do it all in nanoseconds. But it's good to know they're there.

STYLING: ALFONSO FERNANDEZ NAVAS. GROOMING: JESSICA ORTIZ USING PLEASING. MODEL: PERO SIMIC FOR NEW YORK MODEL MANAGEMENT.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RYAN SLACK

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BLOODY GOOD SHOES

Looking to stand apart from the pack? A pair of oxblood loafers—or oxfords, or derbies—is exactly what you need.

BY JONATHAN EVANS

IT'S NOT EVEN A REFRAIN ANYMORE; IT'S A CLICHÉ. "Lighten up, it's summer." Don't buy it—at least not entirely. Opting for airier stuff is a necessary concession to the season, but swapping every color in your wardrobe for Wimbledon white is boring.

So why not subvert expectations? And why not start with a shade normally consigned to the colder months: oxblood. You might know it as Bordeaux or merlot or claret or maroon or burgundy. Call it whatever you like, because it all evokes the same image: a deep, rich red that feels like it's made for frigid days and cozy fireside confines. And it is. But it's also made for so much more—like, for instance, your summertime footwear rotation.

You know what a pair of shitkicking oxblood boots looks like with tweed trousers and a fisherman sweater. (Damn good.) But what about oxblood loafers with worn-in chinos and a white tee? It might be even better. When everyone else is rocking around in dingy canvas slip-ons, the saturated shade certainly stands out in a crowd. Plus, it's a color that works with everything—yes, everything—you could possibly have in your wardrobe.

The old rules about which hue goes with which trousers? Toss 'em out the window. Instead, throw on a pair of oxblood shoes and wear them with black and navy and brown and khaki and indigo. Wear them without trousers entirely (assuming you're wearing shorts). Wear them knowing they're what the penthouse guys wear but also the punks. Then remember that the punks know a thing or two more about style than the penthouse guys, and beat the hell out of your shoes accordingly. Scuff 'em. Scratch 'em. Wear them with abandon, and don't worry about it. After all, it's summer. Lighten up.

LEFT: LOAFERS ($135) BY **G.H. BASS ORIGINALS;** SOCKS ($24 FOR THREE-PACK) AND VINTAGE TROUSERS BY **ABERCROMBIE & FITCH.** RIGHT, FROM TOP: LOAFERS ($145) BY **G.H. BASS ORIGINALS;** SLIDES ($895) BY **ESQUIVEL;** LOAFERS ($345) BY **BLACKSTOCK & WEBER;** SNEAKERS ($128) BY **BANANA REPUBLIC;** SANDALS ($595) BY **MANOLO BLAHNIK.**

STYLING: ALFONSO FERNÁNDEZ NAVAS. MODEL: PERO SIMIC FOR NEW YORK MODEL MANAGEMENT.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RYAN SLACK

Surf Style, for Everyone

He's not real, but he's from southern California. He's the stereotypical stoner-y bro with the too-big board shorts and wraparound shades who still looms large over the idea of surf-inspired style. Forget him. The wave-riding world has so much more to offer, and it's so damn cool that you should wear it whether or not you've stepped on a board. So check out these four brands—one from New York, one from France, another from South Africa, and one more from Brooklyn that's big in Japan—and explore the great wide world of great surf style, no wrap-arounds required. —*Jonathan Evans*

THIS PAGE: JACKET ($435) AND TROUSERS ($265) BY **PILGRIM SURF + SUPPLY;** SHIRT ($150) BY **CUISSE DE GRENOUILLE;** UNDERWEAR BY **CALVIN KLEIN;** NECKLACE ($165) BY **GILES & BROTHER;** FEATHER NECKLACE ($650) BY **SCOSHA;** HAT BY **AMERICAN TRENCH;** SUNGLASSES ($163) BY **RAY-BAN.** OPPOSITE, FROM TOP: JACKET ($170) BY **CUISSE DE GRENOUILLE;** SWEATSHIRT ($125) AND SHORTS ($98) BY **SATURDAYS NYC;** SUNGLASSES ($480), **CELINE BY HEDI SLIMANE;** BEAD BRACELET ($100) AND BRAIDED BRACELET ($90) BY **GILES & BROTHER.** SHIRT ($140) AND SWIM SHORTS ($100) BY **MAMI WATA;** TANK BY **HANES;** SNEAKERS ($75) BY **ADIDAS,** MODEL'S OWN; HAT ($123) BY **ÒL OUTSIDE LINES;** BEADED BRACELET ($185) AND BRAIDED BRACELET ($140) BY **SCOSHA;** VINTAGE AFRICAN BEAD BRACELETS ($100 EACH) BY **GILES & BROTHER.**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RYAN SLACK

STYLING: ALFONSO FERNÁNDEZ NAVAS. GROOMING: JESSICA ORTIZ USING PLEASING. MODELS: ALEC MEZA FOR IMG MODELS; JUSTIN FUENTES AND PERO SIMIC FOR NEW YORK MODEL MANAGEMENT.

MAMI WATA

South Africa–based Mami Wata recently made inroads in the U.S. but remains committed to doing things right at home. That means graphics with roots in African culture, local manufacturing (using local materials when possible), and a grassroots effort to spread the power of Afrosurf throughout the continent. The company is named for a water spirit who takes lovers into the ocean. If they survive the encounter, they return better-looking. From allover-print button-ups and swim trunks to logo tees, the clothes confer the same benefit—without the risk of supernatural drowning.

SATURDAYS NYC

Founded as Saturdays Surf NYC, the 13-year-old brand dropped the *Surf* from its name but still carries the vibe in its clothing—albeit a refined, urban-friendly version thereof. Boldly printed camp-collar shirts fit for a night on the town sit next to beach-ready swim trunks bearing the same pattern. The label's signature "slash" graphic shows up on easygoing tees and intarsia sweaters alike. There's even the occasional tailored jacket or cool-kid penny loafer to be found. It's the type of stuff you could wear to a surf session in the Rockaways and then to a chill session at the brand's Crosby Street store in SoHo afterward.

CUISSE DE GRENOUILLE

Frog's leg. That's what it means, because you're probably wondering. And yes, it is a bit of appropriately tongue-in-cheek branding from a label that first gained acclaim for a sweatshirt that read simply, SURF IN PARIS. (The city's landlocked. That's the gag.) The collection as a whole strikes the same sort of tone. It's relaxed but sophisticated and never takes itself too seriously. Patch-pocket trousers, color-blocked swimsuits, and striped oxford shirts are displayed comfortably alongside tees with logos for an imagined Gentleman Surfer festival. It's enough to make you wish you really could surf in Paris.

PILGRIM SURF + SUPPLY

Pilgrim makes board shorts aplenty, sure. But the brand also churns out pieces like snap-front cardigans, striped chore jackets, wide-leg trousers, and oversize tees—mostly in a range of dusty, earthy tones—that'd look at home on the streets of Brooklyn or Tokyo. That's no coincidence. The first city is where the brand hangs its proverbial hat (and literal ones, too), and the second is the location of one of two outposts in Japan, where Pilgrim has a huge following. (The other shop is in Kyoto.) Think surf style but for the kind of guy who has a table brimming with art books and handmade ceramics.

THE POP YOUR SUMMER NEEDS

The best way to boost your warm-weather style without piling on the layers? Sling a pendant necklace or two around your neck.

BY BARRY SAMAHA

IT'S HIGH SUMMER. YOU'RE GETTING dressed and want to add something to your look—blazer, light jacket, cardigan—but outside it's sweltering. The devil himself is fanning the flames. You know that within minutes of stepping out, your shirt will be covered in wet patches. Layering would be foolish. So how does a man exude style amid the fire and brimstone?

Easy: a pendant necklace.

Jewelry for men remains somewhat divisive, so let's quickly get this out of the way once and for all: Wear it if you want. Don't think twice. You'll look great.

And nowadays, the options are plenty. Jewelry designers are offering baubles that are big and small, colorful and achromatic, and full of symbolism. Feel free to mismatch them. Pile a bean-shaped piece of jade from Tiffany on top of an ornate crescent moon from Harwell Godfrey. Pair Brent Neale's funky little mushroom on a gold chain with Fernando Jorge's simple jasper stone on a leather lanyard. You could even try David Yurman's big onyx-and-silver pendant, a baroque pearl from Mateo, and a golden mask by Khiry all together. Just do what feels right. You won't even break a sweat.

FROM TOP: PENDANT NECKLACE ($4,950) BY **BERNARD JAMES;** PENDANT NECKLACE ($1,600) BY **FERNANDO JORGE;** PENDANT NECKLACE ($2,100) BY **PAMELA LOVE;** PENDANT NECKLACE ($1,850) BY **TIFFANY & CO.;** PENDANT NECKLACE ($4,350) BY **BRENT NEALE;** PENDANT NECKLACE ($350) BY **KHIRY;** NECKLACE ($225) AND PENDANT ($1,500) BY **DAVID YURMAN;** PENDANT NECKLACE ($450) BY **MATEO;** NECKLACE ($2,920) BY **MATEO;** PENDANT ($3,800) BY **HARWELL GODFREY;** PENDANT NECKLACE ($2,750) BY **JACQUIE AICHE;** BOTTLE BY **VEUVE CLICQUOT.** ABOVE: SHIRT BY **MAMI WATA;** TANK BY **HANES;** CHAIN AND PENDANTS, MODEL'S OWN.

PROP STYLING: MIAKO KATOH. RYAN SLACK (INSET). STYLING: ALFONSO FERNÁNDEZ NAVAS. GROOMING: JESSICA ORTIZ USING PLEASING. MODEL: ALEC MEZA/IMG MODELS.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFFREY WESTBROOK

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Take Your Grooming to Go

Here's how to create a simple, effective travel routine without weighing down your Dopp kit

BY GARRETT MUNCE

PACKING FOR A TRIP USED TO PRESENT ME WITH AN IMPOSSIBLE choice. I hate checking bags, so it was either leave my favorite grooming products behind in favor of packing light or figure out a way to cram them all in my bag and pray security wouldn't notice. Then I had a revelation. You don't have to skimp on your skin-care steps just to take a trip. The key to travel-friendly grooming lies somewhere in the middle. It's not about how much or little you take but about choosing smarter products. Now my Dopp kit is prefilled with the following items, so I can just toss it in my suitcase and head out, no hard choices required.

DOVE MEN+CARE ULTIMATE CLEAN TOUCH 0% ALUMINUM REFILLABLE DEODORANT
Not only does this ingenious aluminum-free deodorant reduce plastic waste—pop a refill into the reusable metal casing when you need a re-up—but it's also less than half the size of your usual deodorant. Ideal for sneaking it into your Dopp kit, gym bag, or even pocket. *$15*

JAXON LANE SHAKE AND WAKE ENZYME POWDER FACE WASH
Shake some of this liquid-free powder into your hand and add a dash of water to instantly turn it into a foamy, mild cleanser. It cleans your pores and infuses your skin with protective antioxidants while fruit enzymes also gently exfoliate, leaving your face smooth and clear. *$34*

AMERICAN CREW WHIP
Think of this as vacation hair in a jar. A cross between your favorite styling cream and pomade, it has an airy, whipped texture and gives your hair body and a natural finish without any stickiness. Add in a bit more and you get the control and hold of a thicker product. *$18.50*

EVERIST WATERLESS SHAMPOO CONCENTRATE
There's an entire bottle of shampoo in this toothpaste-like tube thanks to 70 percent less water in the formula. Wet your hair, then rub in a dime-sized amount of this cream. It explodes in lather to cleanse your hair down to the scalp without leaving it feeling dry and crispy. *$24*

CHANTECAILLE GOLD ENERGIZING EYE RECOVERY MASKS
Sure, you could stick a pair of these under your eyes in the morning to erase dark circles, puffiness, and signs of jet lag. But real ones know to also slap them on 30 minutes before your flight lands to emerge looking fresh—not like you just spent hours crammed in coach. *$195 for 8 pairs*

CO. BY COLGATE ON-THE-GO TOOTHPASTE TABS
The only thing more annoying than trying to travel with a full-size toothpaste tube is finding all those little, half-used ones at the bottom of your Dopp kit. These tabs clean it up and last way longer. Pop one in your mouth and chomp down and your saliva turns it into a foaming, ready-to-brush paste. *$14*

NEUTROGENA HYDRO BOOST WATER GEL LOTION WITH SPF 50
This lightweight water-gel moisturizer would be perfect on its own; add in SPF 50 and it goes into diamond-status territory. It's two essential products in one, able to hydrate your dry skin and protect it from the sun's harmful rays no matter what climate you're in. Pro tip: Slather it on before you board your flight. Those rays are stronger above the clouds. *$12.50*

PROP STYLING: MIAKO KATOH

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFFREY WESTBROOK

PARFUMS de MARLY
PARIS

parfums-de-marly.com

"MALL OF AMERICA, MINNEAPOLIS, MN, 1994"

CONFESSIONS OF A NOT-BAD DAD

One kid was manageable. But when the second arrived, he changed everything I thought I knew about my career, my worldview, and myself.
BY KEITH GESSEN

IT'S NOT CLEAR WHY PARENTHOOD WAS SUCH A SURPRISE TO ME. BY THE TIME OUR SON RAFFI was born, I was 40 years old. I knew what a baby was and how one was made. Many of my friends had them. My wife, Emily, even gave me a book to read, *The Birth Partner,* to prepare me for the big event.

I didn't read it. And I didn't visit my friends who had kids. I thought they had entered a different world. I imagined them disapproving of me and my frivolous life. And I, in turn, found them boring. They were obsessed with their tiny little children, with what they ate and where they'd go to school.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARTIN PARR

MAGNUM

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What did it matter? Though children were all around me, I avoided them.

Then our son was born. It was terrifying. He could die! That was the number-one fact about him: He was tiny and fragile. When he was an infant, I carried him like a football, his butt in my hand, his legs draped over my wrist, his head in the crook of my elbow. I was convinced that I would trip while holding him and his head would smash against the ground. There was nothing to prevent this from happening and a lot of things to encourage it. Yet it never happened. He fell down some stairs once and another time almost drowned in a small koi pond, but aside from that, more or less, he emerged from his infancy unscathed.

I was on the old side for a first-time father, even in New York. Immediately, with the wisdom of my years, I began to sort the dads. Some worked all the time and never hung out with their kids—they were suckers. Others stayed home while their spouses worked. They looked down on dads who didn't. I admired them but could not relate.

Eventually I found my people: the not-bad dads. We cared about our kids, deferred to our wives (mostly) on how to raise them, had jobs, but did our fair share on mornings, evenings, nights, and weekends. We were a little incompetent but not for want of trying.

Raffi grew, learned to walk, learned to say words, learned how to get down the stairs. We found a babysitter, then a daycare. Slowly our lives resumed, returning to something like their old course. Two or three times a week, one of us would go out with friends, play hockey, or attend a reading at a bookstore. Things seemed almost manageable. I even took a week and went back to Moscow. Then we had another kid.

ILYA WAS BORN AT HOME, but at nine days old he came down with a fever. Probably we could have stayed in and kept an eye on him, but it was too scary; at that age he had no immune system. We took him to the most terrible place on earth: the pediatric emergency room. It was full of sick babies and kids who had fallen from great heights. Our baby had a fever. They gave him a spinal tap to check for meningitis, and he screamed. Then they put him in a giant bed, hooked him up to every antibiotic imaginable, and, for the next week, removed one antibiotic after the other as the tests for dreaded diseases came back negative. We slept on both sides of his bed, occasionally going out into the city for food, then coming back again and sitting there and waiting. It was, by far, the longest week of our lives.

I did not pray to a god I did not believe in to heal my child, or promise to change my ways, or decide, once and for all, that I would become a better person. I just felt trapped—in that room, in that hospital, in that part of the city where ordinarily we would not go. But I did start seeing my life differently. I started to see my writing career differently. I had spent two decades writing about another country—Russia—but now my life was here. I had arrived in a land I'd never seen before. I should start writing and thinking about that.

Emily's mother stayed with Raffi, who was now three. A few times, they came to visit us in the hospital. Ilya was on the bed, hooked up to a bunch of tubes. A boy in the room next door to ours was in terrible pain. Raffi said hi to his brother, and then we got him out of there. There was a playground nearby, and it was summertime, and Raffi got naked and played in the sprinklers.

I was supposed to think about something else, worry about something else? I couldn't. I started writing about Raffi, about our life with him, about the choices we had made. Raffi as a three-year-old was the most interesting person on earth. He was cuddly and violent and needy and fiercely independent. He had experienced a profound trauma—the birth of a younger brother, his displacement from the center of the universe—and now he had to carry on. Every day we packed him off to daycare. Sometimes I would carry him on my shoulders. Other times I would pretend I was a monster and chase him all the way there. When he got home in the evenings, he rampaged through our apartment. He liked to pick up Ilya's milk bottle and spray it all over our living room. I fucking hated that. I would give him a time-out, as if time-outs were going to address his anguish. I counted the seconds while he was in there. I knew the literature that said time-outs were ineffective, but somehow I thought that because I hated them, and because he hated them, they must be doing someone some good. Of all the things I wish I could undo, the time-outs come first. I missed him too much. My little terrorist.

Was I a good father, a bad father? I don't know. I was just me, in the guise of Dada. But also I was not me at all. I was a completely different person. I had the same face, the same clothes, the same name as before, but whereas that person had known nothing, feared nothing, understood nothing, I now understood a great deal. To think that I once believed people with kids were boring. People with kids are not boring. Underslept, exhausted, miserable—yes. But not boring! Parents feel all the pain of the world immediately, intensely, and always very early in the morning. As a friend who, like me, had lived half his life before becoming a father put it, he had never really noticed life before. More specifically, he had never noticed how many nice places for kids there were near where he lived. "I was blind, but now I see—playgrounds," he said.

It was true. We saw all sorts of things now.

> Of all the things I wish I could undo, the **TIME-OUTS come first.** I missed him too much. My LITTLE TERRORIST.

As my dad friend Matt said one day as we headed to the playground with our then-one-year-olds, realizing he had forgotten some basic item: "Typical dad mistake. Not enough reps!" We did our best. I had spent my 20s and 30s traveling as much as I could to write about the former Soviet Union—that was over now. When Raffi was six months old, I took a short trip to Ukraine. When I came back six days later, Raffi had changed. It was hard to put a finger on, but something had happened. I had missed some vital part of his development. Never again, I said, and mostly I meant it.

5,500 MILES

On 5th October 1931 **Clyde Pangborn and Hugh Herndon, Jr.**, two daring American aviators, completed the world's first nonstop, transpacific flight from Japan to the United States. They took off and landed 41 hours later in Wenatchee, Washington, having covered a distance of 5,500 miles. At the time, it was the longest flight ever made over water.

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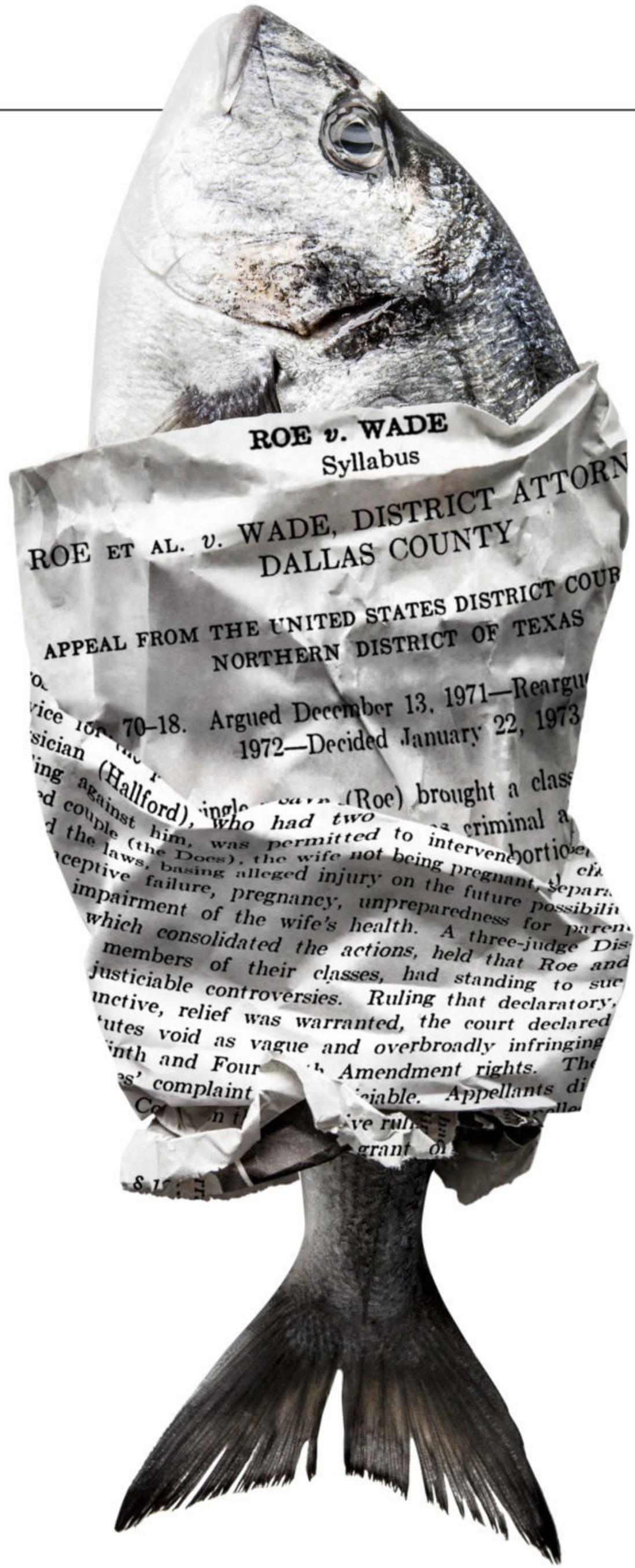
WHAT MEN CAN EXPECT IN A POST-*ROE* WORLD

All Americans should know how to get abortion pills

BY HANNAH MATTHEWS


ROE v. WADE
Syllabus
ROE ET AL. v. WADE, DISTRICT ATTORN
DALLAS COUNTY
APPEAL FROM THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COUR
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
70–18. Argued December 13, 1971—Reargu
1972—Decided January 22, 1973
(Roe) brought a class
(Hallford), who had two
criminal a
abortio
him, was permitted to intervene
(the Does), the wife not being pregnant,
laws, basing alleged injury on the future possibili
ceptive failure, pregnancy, unpreparedness for paren
impairment of the wife's health. A three-judge Dis
which consolidated the actions, held that Roe and
members of their classes, had standing to sue
justiciable controversies. Ruling that declaratory,
nctive, relief was warranted, the court declared
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Amendment rights. The
complaint
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ANGELA BUSER/ISTOCKPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES

MAYBE YOU SAW IT ONLINE. MAYBE YOU heard it on NPR. Maybe your girlfriend told you as you lay in bed together scrolling through your phones, her fielding frantic texts from her group chat or checking in on her mom, you reading legal analyses, both of you fluorescent with rage and despairing at the news: According to a leaked initial draft of its majority opinion, the Supreme Court planned to overturn the *Roe* v. *Wade* decision upholding our constitutional right to abortion. Legal access to safe, common, and often lifesaving medical care was disappearing before your eyes.

But no matter how you learned of this, and no matter how consumed you were with righteous anger and concern that night, I'm willing to bet you did not wake up the morning after, or the morning after that, or every morning since, full of fear. I don't mean that you don't care, because I know you do.

It's just that most cisgender men in my life don't seem to know much about the actual mechanics of abortion, or how it affects them. Until now, a pregnant person's relative access to safe, legal abortion has often provided a luxury to the men around her: the luxury of not having to worry about it or to know who had one or when.

Seventy-three million people worldwide get an abortion every year—a club whose membership has always included people you know and love and date and work with, and there are as many reasons for those abortions as there are members. Mine was that I needed an abortion to avoid the high-risk pregnancy and birth that might have robbed my existing child of a healthy, living mom. I knew it from the moment the plus sign appeared on the pregnancy test.

But there are others. Maybe the embryo couldn't survive, or the person carrying it couldn't. Maybe she couldn't afford a baby. Maybe the pregnancy was the result of a sexual assault. Maybe she didn't want to be a mother. Maybe she was, like me, already a mother. Maybe you were the one who impregnated her. Maybe you'd broken up and weren't speaking. Maybe she didn't want you to know about it because it was only your third date. Maybe you'd go on to fall in love and would spend one terrifying night in May scrolling through the news side by side in your bed.

> If there are hands for the PREGNANT PERSON to hold, they may be YOURS, so I'm now going to tell you what you're in for.

No matter their reasons, if they were lucky enough to have access to a routine first-trimester abortion in an America where *Roe* v. *Wade* was the law of the land, it probably looked something like mine: When I arrived at the clinic for my appointment, and after I had consented in detail to my abortion, I was shown to a small procedure room. I stepped out of my maternity jeans—still the only pants that fit me less than a year postpartum—and my underwear and hopped up onto the crinkling paper. They let me keep my sweater on. I was allowed to ask any questions I wanted, to see or keep the pregnancy tissue if I wished. I was sedated, given antianxiety medication, and offered multiple hands—my nurse's, my husband's—to hold. When I was ready, my provider reached inside my body with the medical instruments necessary to dilate my cervix, to evacuate the contents of my uterus. To make me un-pregnant. There was some pain, and some blood, and lots of intense emotions. And then I went home and made dinner.

In a world where abortions are illegal, they will no longer happen like mine; they will usually be "self-managed." In other words, they will happen, much of the time, at home. On people's couches, while sitting at their desks, in apartment bathrooms shared with roommates. If there are hands for the pregnant person to hold, they may be yours, so I'm now going to tell you what you're in for. A self-managed abortion involves a combination of pills: misoprostol and mifepristone. Luckily, taking them is very safe, safer than taking Viagra, antibiotics, or Tylenol, as long as you actually have access to them. It's even possible to be prescribed abortion pills before someone is pregnant, to have on hand, just in case, right there next to the Advil and the vitamins. She'll take the mifepristone first, then the misoprostol, and soon she'll start to feel cramps. When the tissue leaves her uterus, it might look like a normal period, or there might be blood clots the size of a lemon. Most of it will probably land in the toilet. She might need your physical and emotional support—a heating pad, a home-cooked meal, some favorite movies, a day resting in bed. The process might take a while. It might not.

There's more you're going to have to do in our new world. First—and you've already started this one just by reading this far—understand that you've benefited from abortion, and be able to talk about that. One in four U.S. women (and uncounted numbers of trans and gender-nonconforming Americans) has had an abortion. Maybe your life—like my husband's, or my son's—is made easier, better, or even possible in the first place by a loved one's abortion.

Next, reach out to a local clinic to see if they could use an escort. Help keep patients safe from the harassment and abuse that often become violence as they enter and exit their medical appointments.

Remember who's most at risk. While most illegal abortions will be medically safe, they will nonetheless carry enormous danger for the people and communities already most targeted by law enforcement. After all, they'll be illegal. Think first about the Black and Indigenous people and other people of color, the poor and undocumented people, and the trans people whose bodies are, as you read this, being surveilled, policed, handcuffed in hospital rooms.

Speaking of illegal: Look into encrypted chat apps like Signal. Don't leave a paper trail to incriminate your girlfriend or your Uber driver. Depending on where you live, it may soon no longer be safe to email or text about abortion off these platforms.

But for now—and while we're keeping it general and hypothetical; no medical or legal advice here!—here's one text that will always be safe to send: a message to those of us who love and trust you and whose bodies are about to become illegal. Tell us you're learning about abortion. Tell us you get it. Tell us that you won't abandon us.

Tear This Out. Keep It Somewhere Safe

Resources you'll need after Roe

KNOW WHERE TO GO ONLINE

_As of this writing, a physician will prescribe abortion pills online in many states, at AidAccess.org and JustThePill.com. They come with detailed instructions and medical guidance.

PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUTH IS

_You've likely already been urged to donate to your local abortion funds—a recurring monthly donation, in any amount, if you can swing it. Find yours at AbortionFunds.org.

_Throw cash at organizations that help people travel to safe states and find care. ApiaryCollective.org is a good place to start.

_The Repro Legal Defense Fund helps folks out by mounting defenses, posting bail, and providing other services after arrests or prosecutions for self-managed abortions.

FIND HELP

_The Repro Legal Helpline is 844-868-2812. Save it in your phone.

_When someone in your life needs an abortion—something that will happen more, not less—All-Options Talkline, at 888-493-0092, can point them in the right direction.

_INeedAnA.com can help them find abortion services by location.

"FLAG 2000"

For Whom Does the American Flag Fly?

I'm in no hurry to wave it, but don't tell me I don't love my country

YOU COULDN'T NOT NOTICE IT: A MULTITUDE gathered one morning at an A gate of Phoenix's Sky Harbor Airport, waving little American flags, recording on their cell phones, laying a soundtrack of exuberant cheers. Intrigued or just nosy, I stopped for a look-see, noticed that walls behind the gate desk were adorned with red-white-and-blue bunting, that other walls featured a slogan saluting all those who serve and their families, that the area was also bedecked with flags: an Ameri-

PHOTOGRAPH BY MITCH EPSTEIN

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can flag along with those representing the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, even the one for POW/MIA. Yonder, an agent stood at the mouth of the Jetway and called out the deplaning passengers as if announcing the Suns playoff starters: "From the U.S. Air Force staff . . . !" "From the U.S. Navy . . . !" "Electronics technician first class . . . !" First-class petty officer . . . !" "USS *Mission Bay* rank third class . . . !" Given their hoary hair, their wrinkled mugs, and the fact that some of them caned out of the jet bridge or were pushed in a wheelchair, I surmised that all who exited had earned the honorific of veteran.

It heartened me to see that kind of appreciation for our veterans, so much so that I dawdled past my first urge to leave, so much so that I joined in rounds of applause. Though my enthusiasm was sincere, truth be told, it was also tempered. Matter fact, had somebody tried to hand me a little mini flag, I might've refused it and for damn sure would've been reluctant to wave it.

Why?

Well, because while I believe it commendable and crucial to honor the people who've risked or made the ultimate sacrifice for their/our country, my relationship to the flag is at best complicated, at worst ruined.

The year after it declared independence, the Continental Congress passed the first Flag Act, solidifying the Stars and Stripes as the symbol of America, even boasting that the 13 stars on the Betsy Ross version represented "a new constellation." The second Flag Act, in 1794, provided for 15 stars and 15 stripes (the famous Star-Spangled Banner that inspired Francis Scott Key) to rep the newest states. Of course, the good old U.S. of A. kept right on manifesting its destiny, a mission that also made for some awkward designs.

In 1818, Congress passed the third Flag Act, legislating that it would return to the original 13 stripes to represent the colonies but would add a star for each new state. That third act didn't specify a design for the stars, and that vagueness led to the production of several versions, that is until 1912, when an executive order by President Taft prescribed not only the order of the stars but the proportions of the flag. Two more executive orders, both by President Eisenhower in 1959, further specified the arrangement of the stars, the later one establishing the design of our current flag.

The vexillologists would have me believe the red of Old Glory symbolizes "hardiness and valor"; its white "purity and innocence"; its blue "vigilance, perseverance, and justice."

While I accept those qualities as its symbolic ideals, I also believe that the quiddity of the flag is a question: Who belongs in America?

Which is a query evermore inextricable from who owns America.

Given the centuries that we were chattel, the long rule of Jim Crow, and the machinations fueling mass incarceration, I can say with certainty that it ain't been my peoples. Nonetheless, given Native American pogroms and the Indian Removal and Relocation Acts; given Japanese internment; given the hundred-year-plus crusade for women's suffrage and the leaked intent for SCOTUS to nullify *Roe* v. *Wade;* given the extant rampant schemes of voter suppression and the proliferation of ardent anti-LGBTQ legislation; given the border wall and the inhumanity of brown babies in cages; given the forging of the wealth gap and the cruel persistence of health disparities; given, given, the givens . . . the answer to that essential question is that it might not have been your people neither.

And furthermore, during the fascistic previous administration, the Americans most visible and vocal about their belonging and ownership were the ones hell-bent on using the flag as a cudgel against anybody deemed an other and/or as a scythe to cleave division.

And let me add that, often, they're the same ones proclaiming themselves true patriots.

In George Orwell's classic essay "Notes on Nationalism," he defines patriotism as "devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on other people" and defines nationalism as "the habit of identifying oneself with a single nation or other unit, placing it beyond good and evil and recognizing no other duty than that of advancing its interests." Orwell acknowledges that there's often little distinction between the two and yet argues that "patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally" but "nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power."

In addition to being grounded in America's complicated history, my resistance to revering the flag—and other symbols of American virtue—is fueled by the belief that Orwell's distinctions may no longer exist, that the middle ground is now a chasm, that we've atrophied into (or maybe we've just been exposed as) an era in which nationalism, of a sort indistinguishable from jingoism, has by and large subsumed the patriot.

But I also concede that my perspective has been colored by what's made the news—the vehemence over Colin Kaepernick's kneeling; the tiki torchers threatening, "You will not replace us"; the MAGA insurgents, many clad in patriotic colors, rioting through the halls of the Capitol—and that there are also plenty of Americans who believe this country capable of achieving the ideals enshrined in its founding documents and symbols, whose hoisting of a flag outside their crib won't make the headlines but who are just as important, if not more important, to defining and extending its virtues.

One such acolyte is a buddy of mine—he identifies as a white guy, which seems essential to mention—who says he'll continue to raise a flag out of respect and duty, that he isn't about to let the KKK/Proud Boys/Oath Keepers/Three Percenters of the world usurp its meaning. His arguments, I admit, make a helluva lot of sense.

For him.

But for me? Could the flag ever belong to me and mines? Would it ever be a fitting emblem of our experience? Can we—those who belong to groups coerced into a hyphenated lower class of Americanness—have any lasting impact on its significance?

My buddy asked if I intended to raise a flag outside my house this Fourth of July, and I said no—said it quick, too—and then the very next instant worried whether that decision would make me less American, less deserving of the mythic American dream of prosperity, somehow less worthy of experiencing the highest potential of this place where I was born and, in all likelihood, will die.

A week or so after I stumbled upon the celebrated arrival of a planeload of veterans, I returned from another trip and stopped by the very same gate. That day, there was no excited crowd, no gate agent broadcasting names, no veterans strolling or limping or wheeling off the jet bridge. However, still—the slogan honoring those who served. Still—the patriotic bunting. Still—the beaucoup flags along the walls. All of them inanimate, inert, waiting for someone to come along and imbue them with consequence.

> Some use the flag as a CUDGEL against anyone deemed an OTHER— or as a scythe to cleave division.

The scene at Overstory, sixty-four floors above Manhattan.

the best BARS in america

IT MAY HAVE BEEN A WHILE SINCE YOU PUT ON A PAIR of "nice pants" to go to a bar, but when that very 2022 confluence of joie de vivre and pandemic ennui begins to stir and you hear about a new piano bar with red booths or a semi-secret room with Kubrick-level design details or a place that has the best damn Sazerac in the world, you put one leg in after the other and you order yourself a Lyft. Or, hell, hop on the next flight to New Orleans. It is time for the Big Night Out.

Drinking culture over the past two-plus years has morphed from negronis hastily made on your kitchen counter to cocktails on the go to cautiously rediscovering what it's like to sit at a bar to where we are now—going out with a sense of epicness. "Wasn't this supposed to happen last year, post-vax?" you might ask. It didn't. Things went sideways. But we are happy to report, as per our last bar tab, which included a seafood tower and many martinis: The people want to party.

You'll see proof of it in many of the new bars on this year's list. They're just a little more special. You don't go there for the 'Gram. You may see someone in a white tux. You don't just pop in for a drink after work. You go to feel like it's your birthday even though it's just a Tuesday.

Can you still simply get a drink in peace after a hard day? Yes. Always. We have bars for that purpose on this list, too. But should you find yourself eyeing those nice pants? Wear them. Text a friend or three. And go. —KEVIN SINTUMUANG

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRIAN FINKE

ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

Session at Citizen Vinyl

Let the record spin long enough and if you're lucky, silence leads to a hidden track. So it is at the old Citizen-Times building, the home to Asheville's biggest newspaper. After the printing operations moved to Greenville, South Carolina, the space was reborn in 2020 as a vinyl pressing plant, a record shop, and a very good bar called Session. You can watch blobs of vinyl smooshed into discs, then trimmed into perfect circles, while listening to the Daily Sides—curated playlists available in printed form on clipboards. On one molasses-slow Asheville afternoon, as light streamed through some of the twenty-thousand glass bricks, Lauryn Hill's voice filled the air. A negroni sbagliato turned into a negroni sour, until the record was over and I sat happily at the undulating bar—or perhaps it was me who was undulating—waiting for the hidden track. *14 O'Henry Avenue*
—JOSHUA DAVID STEIN

ATLANTA

St. Julep

On a rooftop high over Atlanta, a DJ is spinning records in the corner and you are consuming boozy soft-serve ice cream. The perfect food pairing for your tequila-mango cone? A flight of house-made corn dogs. St. Julep's breezy indoor-outdoor space has both a bar area with sorbet-hued barstools and several lounge sections with chaises where friends can chill and take in the view. True to its Buckhead roots planted nine floors below, St. Julep also offers a bevy of Outkast-themed drinks, such as the Bowtie, the 13th Floor, and the Ms. Jackson—this last one like a Big Gulp for big kids, with Tito's, cherry Heering, hibiscus, and lime. Can I get a "Hey Ya!"? *374 East Paces Ferry Road NE* —BETH ANN FENNELLY

AUSTIN

Tiki Tatsu-Ya

Ladies and gentlemen, I have met the most perfect server on this side of the Rio Grande. Her name is Feliza Bustos, and if you're lucky she'll be the one carrying out a glowing fishbowl full of gin, lemongrass shochu, and star fruit as the lights begin to flash and dramatic music plays at this maximalist tiki bar in Texas. She sways and twirls like a TGIF waitress on acid before ultimately placing the drink down. Perhaps I am simply verklempt at the sensory overload. Every inch of the wall is taken over by grimacing deities. The tiki drinks on the lavishly illustrated menu are assiduously sourced and served in mugs that are vessels the same way a parade float is a method of conveyance. Feliza delivers my Forbidden Grog in a pale-green seahorse. Inside, the rum runs wild, cavorting with banana, fig, honey, and more. Seahorses are great fathers, I begin to say, but before she can hear more of my *Hippocampus* trivia, Feliza is off, twirling into the night. *1300 South Lamar Boulevard*
—J. D. S.

BROOKLYN

Sunken Harbor Club

You're tucked into a booth in a room that's tucked above a resurrected culinary landmark, Gage & Tollner. You're surrounded by nautical decor that comes across as jokey at first but that begins to feel more like

ESQUIRE ENDORSES **THE HOUSE-PARTY WINE TASTING**

It's as if nature conspired to make Scribe the al fresco oasis in Sonoma. A pioneer of all things en vogue, this winery boasts lush greenery, a range of terroir-driven wines, farm-to-table fare, and, as at any beloved watering hole, people practicing the unspoken art of gathering with comrades. Guests traverse a palm-tree-lined runway that leads to the property's hacienda. Pét-nat in hand, one can meander through the airy estate and take in its Mediterranean design while enjoying golden hour. The key to entry? The Scribe Viticultural Society, which is free to join if you commit to at least two consecutive seasonal allocations from the winery. An easy win-win. *2100 Denmark Street* —SHANIKA HILLOCKS

THE NINES

NEW YORK

Sometimes an evening calls for caviar, club sandwiches, and a piano player.

home with each cold, sweet, surprisingly layered sip of your mai tai. Maybe you're on Fulton Street or maybe you're aboard the wreck of the *Edmund Fitzgerald*. Either way, this is the language of getting lost, and the Sunken Harbor Club is a place where it somehow seems pointless to keep your phone on. St. John Frizell and his team have created a getaway that melts away your stress and ferries you back to the seventies—whether it's the 1970s or the 1870s, we're still not sure. *372 Fulton Street, Second Floor* —JEFF GORDINIER

CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

Little Palm in the Ryder Hotel

"Have you been to Little Palm yet?" asked the kind man shucking oysters at my chosen local establishment on my first evening in town. It was advice I fielded near every day up until I finally made it to the indoor/outdoor craft-cocktail haven—they call it a "swim club" due to its proximity (~ten feet) to the pool—at the Ryder Hotel. Little Palm is like nothing nearby. Motown fills the air as brightly colored boozy concoctions

litter the bar. Daybeds fill. Diner banquettes buzz. A curious crowd gathers nightly: in-the-know locals, blissed-out hotel guests, and industry workers who just cut shift. Women in clacking heels. Men in suits. Families desperate for respite after sightseeing adventures. First dates. Me. My mom. Everyone, in other words. You should, too. *237 Meeting Street* —MADISON VAIN

CHICAGO

Moneygun

Like so many great bars in Chicago, Moneygun feels unassuming at first, dark and no fuss on the fringes of the West Loop. But there's always a youthful energy to the place, no matter the mix of folks in the room—after-work office types, United Center postgamers, restaurant workers at the end of their shift. Part of it is the music: It's always spot-on and DJs are frequent. Ultimately, it's the drinks that keep you coming back.

SUNKEN HARBOR CLUB

BROOKLYN

One of the best places in America to let the rum and tropical libations sail you away.

All familiar classics, yet all made with deft, dialed-in care by beverage director Donavan Mitchem and company. It's like the ideal local haunt, where everything is a little bit better, from the Sazerac to the patty melt. *660 West Lake Street* —K. S.

CINCINNATI

Ghost Baby

Forty-nine feet under a quiet street in Cincinnati, the wail of a saxophone reverberates. This is Ghost Baby, a new bar built in one of the old tunnels that run under the neighborhood known as Over-the-Rhine. More than a century ago, before refrigeration, they served as storage for saloons. Kegs were fished from down below with a pulley and winch. Then the tunnels were abandoned. This one has been turned into an ambitious *Babylon Berlin*-feeling nightclub. There are two rooms in Ghost Baby: the Rattle Room and the Den. Both buzz with bomb-shelter excitement, but the Den is the one with the disco ball and stage, where cats blow in trios and quartets and couples sip imaginative cocktails like one made with fiery vodka, mezcal, and soursop. The drinks are much better than need be, except, I suppose, for the Bud Light, a lager kept around for old times' sake. *1314 Republic Street* —J. D. S.

HASTINGS-ON-HUDSON, NEW YORK

Boro6 Wine Bar

The name is a winking reference to Westchester County, the residential area just north of the Bronx that can feel like an extension of New York City. Traditionally the county has been associated with the literary boozing of John Cheever and Richard Yates, but things have changed, and Boro6 caters to longtime locals and Brooklyn transplants who'd rather have Mediterranean small plates and a glass of grüner veltliner than stale cocktail peanuts and a river of train-station G&Ts. Owners Paul Molakides (an Eleven Madison Park veteran) and Jennifer Aaronson (a *Martha Stewart Living* veteran) understand hospitality in their bones, so bring a paperback of *Revolutionary Road* and linger as long as you want. *549 Warburton Avenue* —J. G.

HONOLULU

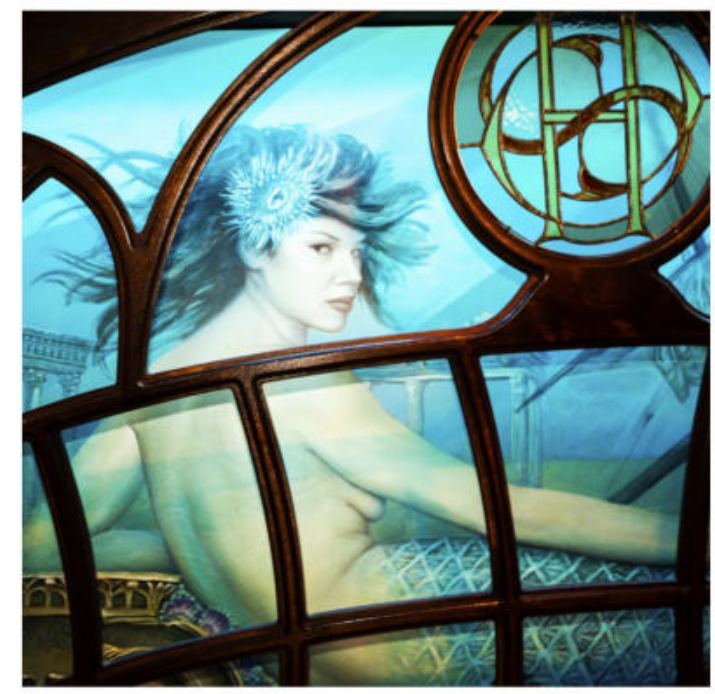
EP Bar

The Hawaiian islands default to cornball. It's seemingly all salt-and-pepper goateed dudes with deep sunburns and Tommy Bahama shirts dancing badly on Waikiki while slamming cup after cup of sickly-sweet piña coladas. But venture away from the beach and find a spot like EP Bar. Located semi-secretly in the back of a coffee shop in downtown Honolulu, the intimate joint spins an impressive collection of vinyl with a nod toward island-centric artists you likely can't identify with Shazam. Kick back with a tropical-inspired cocktail or a highball—a big slice of the menu is dedicated to creative combos of whiskey and seltzer—and let the music wash over you like a gentle wave. *1150 Nuuanu Avenue, Unit A* —DANIEL DUMAS

HOUSTON

Diversión

Houston is a city with zero chill. When people go out, they get dolled up. When they eat, they feast. When they drink, oh brother, wahoo. Diversión, the cocktail bar next to Degust (one of our 2021 Best New Restaurants), doesn't play it cool either, which is . . . cool. The low-slung brick building is a bar kitchen, stocked with more flasks and equipment than a Pfizer lab. Flagons of tinctures, ferments, vinegars, and shrubs line the wall. The bar chefs—led by Steven Enrique Salazar—click on a spotlight when they serve you a drink, and the drinks deserve such lighting. The Night at the Movies is a concoction of Sercial Madeira and cognac with citrus bitters, accompanied by an Android tablet playing a Charlie Chaplin flick. It's a bit de trop. For the slightly more nonchalant, choose from the farm-to-table cocktails. Many of the ingredients are



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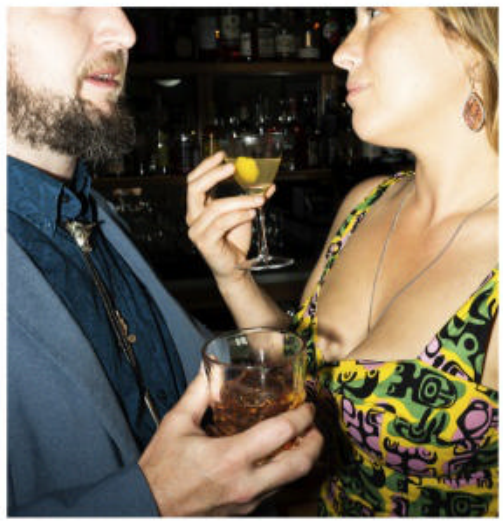


sourced from the bar's own two five-thousand-square-foot farms. *7202 Long Point Road* —J. D. S.

KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE

Brother Wolf

Bitters flow in bright-red ribbons, glow in backlight, and spill into the starlit night from Brother Wolf, an amaro-centric bar near the old train depot in Knoxville. It's not that big a city, and bitters are still a bit niche, so chances are you'll run into someone you know. And you might lean, elbows on the drink rail, peering at the red, yellow, and black pages attached to a brass clipboard that constitute the menu and marveling at the range of amari. And you'll probably order a very good drink, like a negroni bianco (made with gin from up the road and Baglio Baiata Alagna bianco from Sicily) or an Il Professore (made with Fernet and Montenegro), and maybe even bum a Parliament and smoke it outside and run into the owners, Aaron Thompson and his wife, Jessica King, and their two Great Pyrenees, Moose and Badger, and their daughter, Stella, namesake of the adjoining Osteria Stella. *108 West Jackson Avenue* —J. D. S.

LOS ANGELES

Mirabelle

Tucked between a kosher deli and a bakery on an otherwise unremarkable block in Los Angeles's Valley Village—a neighborhood that maintains a fragile balance between Orthodox Jews and the cast of *Vanderpump Rules*—is the best wine bar in town. Walk through the door into a cozy hunting lodge, where the music is played on cassettes and the wine list offers everything from a solid Napa cabernet to a Tavkveri from the country of Georgia. Co-owner Nick Caballero mixes good values with rare and vintage bottles, and lockdown forced the tiny hot-plate-and-toaster-oven kitchen out into the parking lot, where a Santa Maria grill cooks whole fish over white oak. A nightly happy hour has inexpensive bottles and a solid burger. Perhaps best of all, the clientele is the valley's creative middle class; the place is packed with showrunners, comedy writers, and character actors, perfectly good company whom the paparazzi leave alone. It's the city's best-kept secret. Enjoy it before the *Vanderpump* kids find out. *12518 Burbank Boulevard* —DAVE HOLMES

ESQUIRE ENDORSES

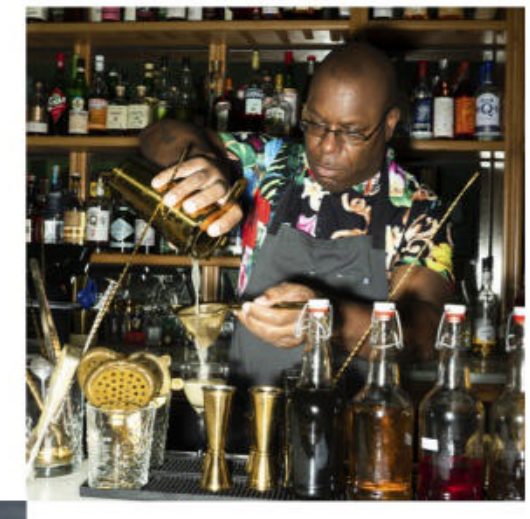
THE JAZZ CLUB

A jazz club is often unassuming on the outside but brilliant and unpredictable inside. My favorite kind is where the number of musicians playing equals the number of people watching: small rooms, back rooms, living rooms, basements. The past few years have been good for these pockets of joy in New York. Places like Wild Birds, Marian's, and Bar Bayeux in Brooklyn; the lush subterranean warrens at the Canary Club on the Lower East Side; and the Special Club in the West Village, a short walk from the OG of all basement spots, Smalls. To enter any of these hallowed rooms—which you can do pretty much any night of the week—is to enter the stuff of life itself: a wild improvisatory ride, a groove, communion, community, with an Old Pal in one hand, put down to clap after solos are traded, but only for a moment before you grasp it again. —J. D. S.

MIAMI

Paradis Books & Bread

The buzz surrounding the number of global restaurant brands setting their sights on Miami can obscure another boom: a flourishing independent food-and-wine scene. Paradis Books & Bread, a breezy natural-wine bar and radical bookstore in North Miami, has emerged as a key



PEYCHAUD'S

NEW ORLEANS

One of the latest spots in NOLA in which to commune with its cocktail history.

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DAD BODS? SHRINK YOUR GUT

How To Drop Weight At Any Age

BEING A TRAINER, bodybuilder, and nutrition expert means that companies frequently send me their products and ask for my stamp of approval. Most of the time I dive into research, test the product out, and send the company honest feedback. Sometimes, however, I refuse to give the product a try, because frankly, the ingredients inside aren't real food. And I'd rather drink diesel fuel than torture my body with a chemical concoction. It began a few months back when I was complaining about my aches and pains to my marathon-running buddy, Ben, who is my same age. He casually mentioned how he uses CBD oil to help with his joint pain. He said that CBD has given him more focus and clarity throughout the day and that his lingering muscle and joint discomfort no longer bothered him. He even felt comfortable signing up for back-to-back marathons two weekends in a row this year.

Like my father always said, "What you put inside your body always shows up on the outside."

One protein shake that I received, that will remain nameless, was touted as 'the next big shake' but really had a list of gut destroying ingredients. Everywhere I read I saw harmful artificial ingredients, added sugars, synthetic dyes, preservatives and cheap proteins; the kind of proteins that keep you fat no matter how hard you hit the gym, sap your energy and do nothing for your muscles.

Disappointed after reviewing this "new" shake, I hit the gym and bumped into my favorite bodybuilding coach. This guy is pushing 50, has the energy of a college kid, and is ripped. So are his clients.

While I firmly believe that the gym is a no-talk focus zone, I had to ask, "Hey Zee, what protein shake are you recommending to your clients these days?"

Zee looked at me, and shook his head. "Protein shakes are old news and loaded with junk. I don't recommend protein shakes, I tell my clients to drink INVIGOR8 Superfood Shake because it's the only all natural meal replacement that works and has a taste so good that it's addicting."

Being skeptical of what Zee told me, I decided to investigate this superfood shake called INVIGOR8.

Turns out INVIGOR8 Superfood Shake has a near 5-star rating on Amazon. The creators are actual scientists and personal trainers who set out to create a complete meal replacement shake chocked full of superfoods that—get this—actually accelerate how quickly and easily you lose belly fat and builds even more lean, calorie burning muscle.

We all know that the more muscle you build, the more calories you burn. The more fat you melt away the more definition you get in your arms, pecs and abs.

The makers of INVIGOR8 were determined to make the first complete, natural, non-GMO superfood shake that helps you lose fat and build lean muscle. The result is a shake that contains 100% grass-fed whey that has a superior nutrient profile to the grain-fed whey found in most shakes, metabolism boosting raw coconut oil, hormone free colostrum to promote a healthy immune system, Omega 3, 6, 9-rich chia and flaxseeds, superfood greens like kale, spinach, broccoli, alfalfa, and chlorella, and clinically tested cognitive enhancers for improved mood and brain function. The company even went a step further by including a balance of pre and probiotics for regularity in optimal digestive health, and digestive enzymes so your body absorbs the high-caliber nutrition you get from INVIGOR8.

While there are over 500 testimonials on Amazon about how INVIGOR8 "gave me more energy and stamina" and "melts away abdominal fat like butter on a hot sidewalk", what really impressed me was how many customers raved about the taste. So I had to give it a try.

When it arrived I gave it the sniff test. Unlike most meal replacement shakes it smelled like whole food, not a chemical factory. So far so good. Still INVIGOR8 had to pass the most important test, the taste test.

And INVIGOR8 was good. Better than good. I could see what Zee meant when he said his clients found the taste addicting.

I also wanted to see if Invigor8 would help me burn that body fat I'd tried to shave off for years to achieve total definition.

Just a few weeks later I'm pleased to say, shaving that last abdominal fat from my midsection wasn't just easy. It was delicious.

Considering all the shakes I've tried I can honestly say that the results I've experienced from INVIGOR8 are nothing short of astonishing.

A company spokesperson confirmed an exclusive offer for Esquire readers: if you order INVIGOR8 this month, you'll receive $10 off your first order by using promo code "**ESQ10**" at checkout. If you're in a rush to burn fat, restore lean muscle and boost your stamina and energy you can order INVIGOR8 today at DrinkInvigor8.com or by calling 1-800-958-3392.

member of this new school. Inside on a normal afternoon, regulars meet up to trade notes on their readings while the team puts out small plates whose recipes, co-owner and sommelier Bianca Sanon proudly admits, are mostly stolen from cherished sources like the *Apartamento Cookbook*. Few items cost more than ten bucks. Outside under the palm trees, people drink from a bottle list that could give most places in Paris's 11th a run for their money. *12831 West Dixie Highway, North Miami* —GABE ULLA

MYSTIC, CONNECTICUT

The Port of Call

Could you take a trip to this coastal town just to visit one bar? You will quickly discover that there's a thriving food-and-drink scene to fill your days, but should you make a stop only at the Port of Call, you will be, well, a happy sailor. The horseshoe bar and the floor beneath are conjured from wood salvaged from old ships. The drinks, concocted by Jade Ayala and Sebastian Guerrero, are pure alchemy, incorporating things like rice koji, pét-nats, and spirits and infusions custom-made with the help of the experimental lab at the nearby Real McCoy Spirits distillery. They are, as they say, next-level. And the food is devised to match the drinks—pairings are even suggested. You will leave satiated on daiquiri twists and squid-ink empanadas, but when the rest of the town closes, come back for Dive down below, where a cold beer and a maximalist hot dog topped with bonito aioli and kimchi will steel your nerves for the misty walk home. *15 Water Street* —K. S.

NEW ORLEANS

Jewel of the South

Bartender Chris Hannah is one of the pillars of cocktail culture and knowledge in New Orleans, and thus a national treasure. He holds court behind the bar here, in this lovely cottage on one of the quieter streets in the French Quarter, making what are arguably the best cocktails in this town, and thus America. You will have the very best Sazerac here. The very best French 75. And several other obscure historic concoctions he's dusted off, as well as sublime new creations. You will come for the drinks, but the decadent foods—Wagyu tongue, sweetbreads, caviar—will have you staying for extra rounds. *1026 St. Louis Street* —K. S.

Peychaud's

While this bar opened in the middle of the pandemic, you wouldn't be able to tell given the name or locale of the place. That's because, as in so much of NOLA, its history runs deep. This building was the home of Antoine Peychaud, whose namesake bitters are the key ingredient to the granddaddy of NOLA cocktails, the Sazerac. You will get an excellent one of those here at the hands of barman Nick Jarrett, but the pro move is to head to the courtyard in the back and order the Peychaud's Fizz, a refreshing aperitivo that will stave off the humidity in the Quarter. *727 Toulouse Street* —K. S.

NEW YORK

Chez Zou

Chez Zou is the Dunkirk of cool on Manhattan's West Side, a rearguard action mounted to show that even in the soulless spires of midtown west, pockets of pleasure remain. On the fourth floor of one such tower in a newly built complex called Manhattan West is the cocktail haven Chez Zou. The design, by vibey design firm AvroKO, is all curves and greenery. The drinks, served from a glowing alcove, nod to the Mediterranean. You can taste the mistrals, for instance, in the martini, made with olive-oil-washed vodka and grape-leaf brine.

OVERSTORY

NEW YORK

Sky-high views and stellar drinks. An intoxicating combo.

But there's something about a colada, here made with mango milk punch and pomegranate, arriving in its Technicolor gradation, that feels like spoils for a victor. Even if the war is lost, at least tonight at Chez Zou, the battle has been won. *385 Ninth Avenue, Fourth Floor* —J. D. S.

The Nines

Part supper club, part piano bar, all sumptuous. This is idealized old-school New York glamour. Cozy banquettes, a piano player performing jazz covers of pop songs, martinis, shrimp cocktail, caviar, leopard-print carpet, bartenders in white jackets, servers in black dresses, and all of the dressed-up crowd looking a little better in the golden light of a blood-red room. The Nines, a labor of love from restaurateur Jon Neidich, feels of another time, yet when you're here, you will feel nowhere but now. Go on, order that second martini. *9 Great Jones Street* —K. S.

Overstory

The Rainbow Room, New York's premier skyborne bar, atop Rockefeller Center, closed to the public in 1998, depriving the drinking world of superlative cocktails sipped while tickling the underbelly of clouds. But the story isn't over. A quarter century

later, at Overstory, all those decadent, atmospheric vibes shine even brighter and more brilliantly. On the sixty-fourth floor of an art deco building, Overstory distills Rainbow's vastness into an intimate twenty-six-seat oval room with silken walls and velvet banquettes. Everything glows here, like some sort of nightlife empyrean. I like my manhattans rye up perfect, but I ain't mad at this one. It consists of cacao-nib miso-infused whiskey, fermented blackened pear, single-malt whiskey, and smoked rhubarb amaro. It comes over ice, which is nice, and when sipped with the city's blanket of blinking jewels below you, even if it isn't a perfect manhattan, it's a perfect manhattan. *70 Pine Street, Sixty-fourth Floor* –J. D. S.

OAKLAND

Snail Bar

As the name might suggest, the move at Snail Bar, in Oakland's Temescal district, is to take it *s-l-o-o-o-w*. Get there early (the place tends to fill up fast) and grab a glass (or a bottle). Chef and founder Andres Giraldo Florez, who spent years in Michelin-starred kitchens, has a serious interest in natural wines, which he pairs with an array of fun small plates prepared with precision, like the snails, a buttery, ultra-umami miso blast that's cut with razor-thin slices of sweet 'n' tart kumquats. It's the closest you'll get to Paris in northern California. *4935 Shattuck Avenue* –OMAR MAMOON

ESQUIRE ENDORSES

GOING LOW ABV

After three rounds of cocktails at the new old El Quijote in NYC's Hotel Chelsea, I was expecting to stumble east—wait, west—on Twenty-third Street to fall asleep on the F train home. Instead, I walked in a straight line and soberishly thought, *Either I have God-level tolerance or the drinks were weak*. Happily, the latter is true and part of a trend of lower-ABV cocktails that are still spirited but not punishingly so. The Adonis, for instance, balances amontillado sherry, Basque cider, and single-malt whiskey but still weighs in at 20 percent ABV as opposed to the usual 30 to 35 percent. This is a boon. You can try more, stay longer, and stop wondering why you ordered that last round. —J. D. S.

JEWEL OF THE SOUTH

NEW ORLEANS

With some of the city's best cocktails, it's easy to feel at home in Jewel's Creole cottage.

OXFORD, MISSISSIPPI

Bar Muse

This little speakeasy, entered through an unmarked door off a brick alley, clocks in at a mere 264 square feet, yet that's enough space for cocktail wizard and co-owner Joe Stinchcomb to work his alchemy. The frequently changing craft cocktails often reference Black history or culture, whether that means Nina Simone or *The Boondocks*. HBO's *The Wire* was celebrated with six stunners, including the Omar Comin'. Coriander-infused Scotch whisky captured the fierce masculinity Michael K. Williams brought to his character, but flavors of mango, ginger, lime, and cardamom reflected the complexity of the Omar who tenderly kissed his boyfriend, shopped in his pj's, and took his grandmother to church. *The Wire* can be rewatched on HBO, but there's no resurrection for the Omar Comin': Stinchcomb gets bored after a few weeks and retires his menus. If you want to keep pace with his newest obsessions, you'll just have to drink there more often. *1006 Van Buren Avenue* –B. A. F.

PORTLAND, OREGON

Takibi

Named after the Japanese word for bonfire, Takibi is nestled in the Portland headquarters of Japanese-based outdoors brand Snow Peak. The space is centered on a wood-burning hearth and serves up izakaya-inspired fare alongside sake, wine, cider, and beer sourced mostly from Oregon and Japan. Then there's the cocktail menu, mashing up both regional influences and dreamed up by famed mixologist and beverage director Jim Meehan. Be certain not to miss the Tanigawa, Takibi's signature riff on the julep. Blending single-malt whisky and umeshu (a liqueur made from ume plums) and piled high with shaved ice from a traditional kakigori maker, it's the ethos of the whole place distilled into a single drink. *2275 Northwest Flanders Street* –JONATHAN EVANS

SAN DIEGO

Youngblood

After walking through a secret door in the back of a gastropub, you find yourself in an amber-hued room with soaring ceilings and a number of carefully considered bottles dotting the walls. Soon Champagne materializes and you're chatting with the bartenders about spirits and flavors or even music you're obsessed with. Youngblood doesn't have menus; instead the staff susses out a vibe and creates a cocktail experience structured like a meal: appetizer, main course, dessert. Don't be afraid to get funky. Oaxacan rum with pineapple, absinthe, and Chartreuse doesn't sound like it would work but, holy hell, does it ever work. *777 G Street* –D. D.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

Silver Lyan

At the bars of Ryan Chetiyawardana (aka Mr. Lyan) across the Atlantic, the high-concept menus could always be the highlight of a London or Amsterdam visit. His first bar stateside, beneath the Riggs hotel, has similarly brainy drinks that will leave you contemplating whether you too can age manhattans in a microwave or whether Amalfi lemon distillate is what your martinis have been missing. For deepest contemplation, opt to take your cocktail in the former bank vault. *900 F Street NW* –K. S.

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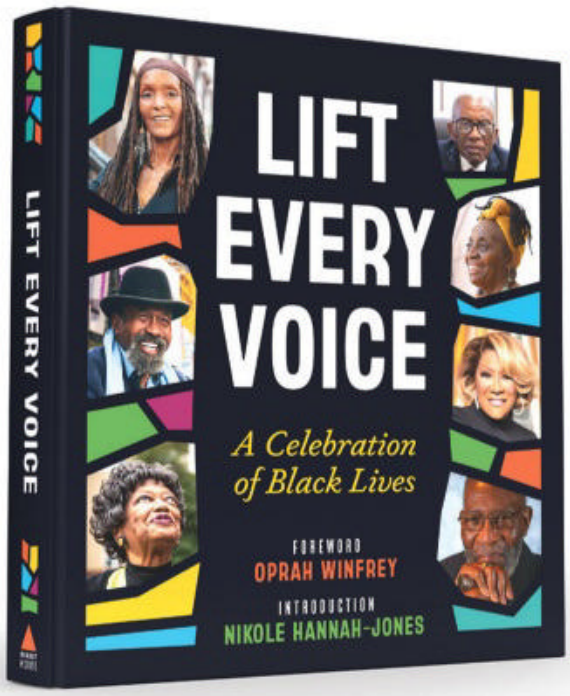

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Issue Four

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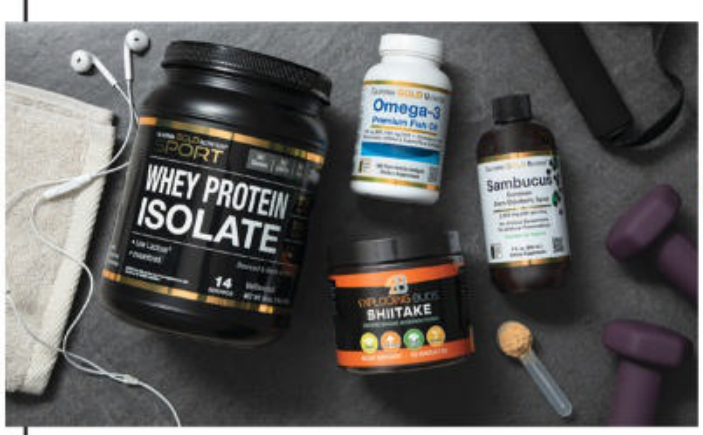

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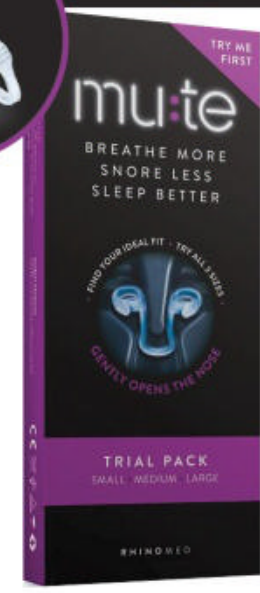

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BEING ELLIOT PAGE

In December 2020, after disclosing that he is transgender, the Oscar-nominated actor and star of Netflix's *The Umbrella Academy* (season 3 out June 22) became the most famous trans man on the planet. That's made him the target of indescribable hate but has also brought him unimaginable joy. Here, in his own words, he talks about his childhood, his career, his transition, and his life, though not necessarily in that order. PHOTOGRAPHS BY RUVEN AFANADOR STYLING BY BILL MULLEN

T-shirt, **Celine by Hedi Slimane;** ring by **Sterling Assault.**

WHAT I'VE LEARNED

Elliot Page, actor and advocate, 35, New York City

What have I learned from transitioning? I can't overstate the biggest joy, which is really seeing yourself. I know I look different to others, but to me I'm just starting to look like myself. It's indescribable, because I'm just like, there I am. And thank God. Here I am. So the greatest joy is just being able to feel present, literally, just to be present. To go out in a group of new people and be able to engage in a way where I didn't feel this constant sensation to flee from my body, this never-ending sensation of anxiety and nervousness and wanting out.

When I say I couldn't have ever imagined feeling that way, I mean that with every sense of me.

My dad had a cabin on the south shore of Nova Scotia with no running water or electricity. I was obsessed with tree frogs. I would watch them hop along for hours, probably because of how tiny they were. I've noticed as an adult how nourishing and crucial it is for me to feel connected to nature. I *need* it. When I'm in those spaces, my whole body will relax. My stress dissipates. I can get quiet.

I spent a lot of my childhood in the woods.

When I was a little kid, all I wanted my parents to play was the *Bodyguard* soundtrack. Loved. And Annie Lennox, *Medusa*. I think that had a lot to do with the cover. I'd just stare at Annie Lennox. My mum's music was a lot of Cat Stevens and Sting. The Tragically Hip—they're fantastic. My dad was more jazz—Shirley Horn, Ruth Brown.

I don't think I ever actually saw *The Bodyguard*. I should watch it. Now I'm feeling embarrassed.

I went to a different school every year during high school, so I never really had that single teacher mentor. When I left Halifax to go to Toronto in grade eleven, I thought the bullying would lessen, in regard to what people were clearly bullying me about. And that wasn't the case at all. Bullying puts you in a place where, later, you have so much *un*learning to do. If you're getting teased and made fun of and called names on a daily basis, there's no way that's not going to get inside of you—particularly when you're already feeling so much shame. Nobody even needs to open their mouth and you're already feeling it.

Those kids left a whole bunch of shit that I had to dig through and unlearn. I'm sure I could bring up a moment and one of them wouldn't remember it, because it didn't mean anything to them. I'd like to think they regret it now.

I always wanted my mum to take me to the school plays, even if I didn't know what they were about. There was some kind of urge to be in places like that.

I so rarely read novels, but I did just—not just, but a few books ago—I read *Real Life,* by Brandon Taylor. It's fantastic. He's such a phenomenal writer, it just floors you. That I really, really loved. And it's quite rare. I read novels more when I was younger, in high school. I didn't go to college, or university, so I'm adamant and disciplined to read a lot. Nonfiction, pretty much.

My childhood best friend and I are still very, very close. His name is Mark, and what I've learned from him—and what's so astounding about him—is his strength and sensitivity. Not being afraid to share your emotions, your pain, to not compromise who you are. Mark quarantined and came to Toronto to take care of me after my top surgery, and we recorded an EP on his four-track while I recovered. That's what we were doing—writing these little songs. That sound was just us having fun. There's nothing better than creating things with friends.

Mark's initials are tattooed under my right collarbone.

I was a pretty serious soccer player as a kid. I loved the discipline. I loved learning about teamwork. I loved even the more spiritual elements of it—what it means to find and create empty space.

This page: T-shirt and trousers, **Celine by Hedi Slimane;**
ring by **Sterling Assault.**
Opposite: Shirt and trousers by **Giorgio Armani;**
stud set by **Lindsay & Co,** available at Bergdorf Goodman, NYC.

Shirt, trousers, and tie by **Gucci;** two-finger ring by **Sterling Assault;** ring by **the Great Frog;** vintage boots, available at **Stock Vintage, NYC;** socks by **Falke.**

As a kid, it was complicated in relation to my gender. I remember the year the genders were separated. I was so distraught, so inordinately distraught. I was crying to my mum, "Please, one more year, one more year!" When I was playing with the boys—soccer, touch football, out back during recess and lunch—I was having a blast. They did let me play one more year, then I had to go to the girls' team. I looked like the other boys, which I was. I'd be on the field about to kick the ball when a ref would say, "I don't think boys are allowed to play on this team." I still played soccer for years, but a lot of love for it was not there.

What else have I just read that's so good . . . oh, *Somebody's Daughter,* by Ashley C. Ford. Fantastic.

The reaction to my transition? I didn't expect it to be so big. In terms of the actual quality of the response, it was what I expected: love and support from many people and hatred and cruelty and vitriol from so many others. I came out as gay in 2014, and it's different. Transphobia is just so, so, so extreme. The hatred and the cruelty is so much more incessant.

I think when people say, "Oh, he'll want to play cis male characters now," the sensation I get is that the subtext is: They think that would be an accomplishment for me. Versus: I'm trans, I'm queer, and I *want* to play *those* roles. When I get asked, "Are you worried about getting typecast?" You wouldn't say to J-Law or Rooney Mara or someone, are they worried about getting typecast as cis straight women? But at the same time, of course I want a space where trans people are getting cast as cis characters. Of *course*.

***Ace Ventura* was like my favorite movie** when I was a kid. I was doing impressions. And I've been in films with super-problematic things. But it's funny now when people are like, "You're too sensitive about jokes." If you look back, all the stuff that's so horrible, I was going home and watching some sitcom with constant gay jokes after school every day. As were the kids who ended up being bullies.

"You're too sensitive." Excuse me? The stuff trans people deal with on a day-to-day basis? *Excuse me?*

This really big dude, less than an arm's length away, was just screaming at me, "You faggot! Don't look at me! You faggot, faggot!" I couldn't even just go, like, *I'm not looking at you*. It was the one time I'd left the hotel that whole day. I was just trying to cross the street, and I couldn't because it was Sunset Boulevard and there's traffic, so I decided in my brain—because he was *so tall*—that I couldn't do anything physically. If I said something, he could retaliate. If I turned around, that could trigger something else. So I thought, *I'm just going to have to bet on standing completely still and staring straight ahead*.

And then eventually, after him yelling, "Faggot! Faggot! Faggot!" some more, he started to walk off and I started to cross the street. And then he just started screaming, behind me, "I'm gonna kill you, you fucking faggot! I'm gonna kill you, you fucking faggot! I'm gonna gay-bash you!" So I ran—I was alone—I ran into a convenience store, and as I was opening the door he yelled, "This is why I need a gun!"

Yeah, I don't think people really get it.

Why is sensitivity weaponized? I really feel for cis men in regard to the restraints and repression and suppression that stem from the expectations of your gender. When I came out, I posted a selfie with a thank-you note, just to show how much all the love and support meant. And I saw this comment—I should very much not be looking at the comments, but this guy said, "Oh, yeah, as if a *guy* would ever write something sensitive like that." I feel bad for that guy. I feel bad that he's been brought up in a society that equates masculinity with emotionlessness. That's a really shitty way to live, because it's going to come out in another direction, and another.

I've never worked out more in my life. Working out always felt like such a conundrum, because it didn't feel good. I walked and I hiked, but that was it. The experience of being in my body now is so different. I'm absolutely hooked. The feeling of being really engaged with it, present, pushing it and getting stronger and gaining weight. It's thrilling. I feel like a kid doing it.

I have one, two, three, four, five, six, seven . . . nine. Nine tattoos. They're mostly references to people in my life. One is one of my best friends' nicknames. One is one of my best friends' middle names. I have a little coffee cup, which I share with a dear friend. I have friends' initials, typically from periods of my life when I don't know if I would have necessarily gotten through them without certain individuals.

SPIKE. Spike Jonze.

WIIG.

EP PHONE HOME is just a sweet thing.

The word TURTLES is pretty much a random tattoo. I do love turtles.

The first tattoo I ever got was for Catherine Keener. It's my nickname for her, which is C KEENS. That's just under my top right shoulder. I've known Keener since I was nineteen—she's my oldest friend in L. A., in that whole world. Keener taught me not to take bullshit, to keep my feet on the ground, to live my truth, and to take care of my heart.

When *Juno* was at the height of its popularity, during awards-season time, I was closeted, dressed in heels and the whole look—I wasn't okay, and I didn't know how to talk about that with anyone. But I could with Keener. I was living in a hotel by myself, and she came and got me. I lived with her. For my twenty-first birthday, she had a surprise party for me. I didn't really know anybody, so everyone wore name tags. I wore one, too. Nobody knew me, and they brought these funny little gifts. It was really sweet. There are people I met that night who are tattooed on my body.

"EUPHORIA: SUMMER, *it's hot out,* AND *I'm just in a white T-shirt that fits me,* WALKING DOWN THE STREET, SHOULDERS BACK, *enjoying the* SUN AND THE DAY."

And then also a memoir I just read that is absolutely one of the best things I've ever read is called *Punch Me Up to the Gods,* by Brian Broome. Amazing. *A. Mazing. Astounding.*

How does money change a person? That's a dissertation. I'm still trying to wrap my mind around it because it just shocks me sometimes.

There are many different types of both sex and love. And that's what can make it confusing—hence how painful all of it can be. Love is navigating the possibility of: Am I going to be able to love someone who isn't perfect, and are *they* going to be able to love someone who isn't perfect? That nonperfect person being me. And if that love and beauty exists in that space, that feels a lot different from having sex and ignoring the underneath of it all, and not being true and honest, and being afraid to share your real self. I don't think that could be considered love—or *true* love, if that exists.

Sex can also just be its own separate, free, fun, healing, curious, hot, euphoric activity that has no attachment. Sex is great is all I'm trying to say.

Euphoria: Summer, it's hot out, and I'm just in a white T-shirt that fits me, walking down the street, shoulders back, enjoying the sun and the day. In the past, that would've been a very different walk. Instead, you have ideas

blossoming in your mind, not constant feelings of shame and self-hatred.

One of my favorite books ever is *In the Dream House,* by Carmen Maria Machado.

I love being a dog dad. I need that in my life. I don't even know where to begin with Mo; I'm so obsessed with him. My heart breaks at the thought of mortality whenever I think of him.

Everything that's being said about us is all the same shit that was said about LGB people: pedophiles, mentally ill, should they be allowed in the changing rooms. It's the same. It's the same. But the politicians are saying, *Oh, shit! This is working!* And that's what's scary.

As much as we could sit here and say our thoughts about, like, Marjorie Taylor Greene, she has a big following! And she's saying that, essentially, transgender people are going to be responsible for the end of existence. That degree of rhetoric is really alarming and horrible. It's also endless misinformation—and people buy it. The idea of gender being a binary concept specifically based on genitalia is a very new idea in relation to human history. We existed in every culture throughout history! People don't learn about that reality. They're *banning* kids from learning it. It's all tactical.

I thought it was impossible how I'm able to feel now. The degree of creativity that's come out—just a surge of creativity. Mark and I were making those songs; I have just about completed the first draft of a book; I wrote a screenplay with my friend B, Beatrice Brown, who did a lot of my tattoos.

I get up at six. I have coffee and I usually try to write for two hours. I just go into a portal. I sit down, and I am processing, and I'm telling a story—versus when I would hardly allow myself to be aware of it. Then I take my dog for a really nice walk, and then I try to write for another couple hours. In the afternoon, I feel it out. Because you're writing about intense things—not only full of feelings and trauma and difficulties, but also, this is the longest I've ever even sat with so much of that. With the things that have happened. It's an interesting experience, the fact that writing certain things can trigger a physiological response. It's so fascinating, the body.

I used to wonder how humans were going about their lives. I'd just look at people. How do you *do it?*

Probably my favorite thing to cook is a big spread of roasted vegetables of all kinds. Fennel, broccoli, cauliflower. *Ummm.* Japanese sweet potatoes, I love. And then brown rice, I love. And then I just kinda make some tofu in the pan, then steam or boil it—do you know kombu? Seaweed? You boil it, and then—this is funny—and then you mix it all in with some tahini or something, and then you roll it in the kombu. I'm telling you, it's *good.*

Then other times I eat like a teenage boy. I'm like, cereal: Good to go. Or I get fancy and make a frozen burrito.

I love making *The Umbrella Academy.* I've learned how special it is to play one character for so long, to evolve with a family of characters. All of us have gone through a lot. Years have gone by, and we've changed and grown in our own ways. I love watching the growth happen alongside the show, our personalities interweaving and all of us having our own moments. I'm just learning to love the whole journey of it.

Activism, for me, feels natural and organic. It feels worse when I'm *not* actively engaged. And I don't think it stems from feeling some sort of pressure or obligation. I hope it comes from a place of, inherently, empathy. I like to think I'm an empathetic person.

But then on some level, *yeah,* activism is something I must do. I think we need to utilize all of our privilege in our own ways. We all have some version of it, you know?

I can't pinpoint a "worst" day. But when *Juno* was blowing up—this sounds strange to people, and I get that people don't understand. *Oh, fuck you, you're famous, and you have money, and you had to wear a dress,*

boo-hoo. I don't *not* understand that reaction. But that's mixed with: I wish people would understand that that shit literally did almost kill me.

I've had to have plenty of devil's-advocate conversations with cis people who were like, "Well, I'm not trans and I could wear a skirt!" And it's like, cool. Okay. Great. So yeah, in my early to mid-twenties, I didn't know how to tell people how unwell I was. I would berate myself for it. I was living the life and my dreams were coming true, and all that was happening. And yet, for example, when I was shooting *Inception,* I could pretty much not leave whatever hotel I'd be staying in.

I struggled with food. Intense depression, anxiety, severe panic attacks. I couldn't function. There were days when I'd only have one meeting, and I'd leave my house to go to the meeting and have to turn around. Not being able to get through a script—could not. Reading is one of my favorite things to do—I couldn't read, couldn't get through a paragraph.

I could not picture myself as a woman aging. Obviously. It was just like, what is my future? There's not a future. That's kind of what it felt like. I would say, verbatim: *I've never been a girl. I'll never be a woman.*

Can I relate to the suicide problem among trans people? Yeah, I can relate deeply. And not only to the very conscious, direct act of doing it but also certain times when I lost so much weight or when I was having such severe panic attacks and collapsed multiple times—all these things that very easily could, and statistically do, lead to death. And that's all a manifestation of that trauma and discomfort that's a disproportionate issue for transgender people.

There were moments of wanting to not be here, but that was just the sensation that I was left with. It wasn't a movement for action—other than the ways in which I was abusing my body, clearly. I would look out the window of my apartment and think, *With everything going on right now and how incredible it all is,* this *is how I feel? And I'm twenty-two?* It was like, *I don't know if I could do it.*

the title character. It related to my queerness and my transness. And then you have that film have the success it had, and the major, major profit, between the film and the soundtrack—and then you fucking squash that all away. You squash it. So you're benefiting greatly from this character that connected with people, and then you do that. It's gross.

I wish I could go back and experience it now. As me.

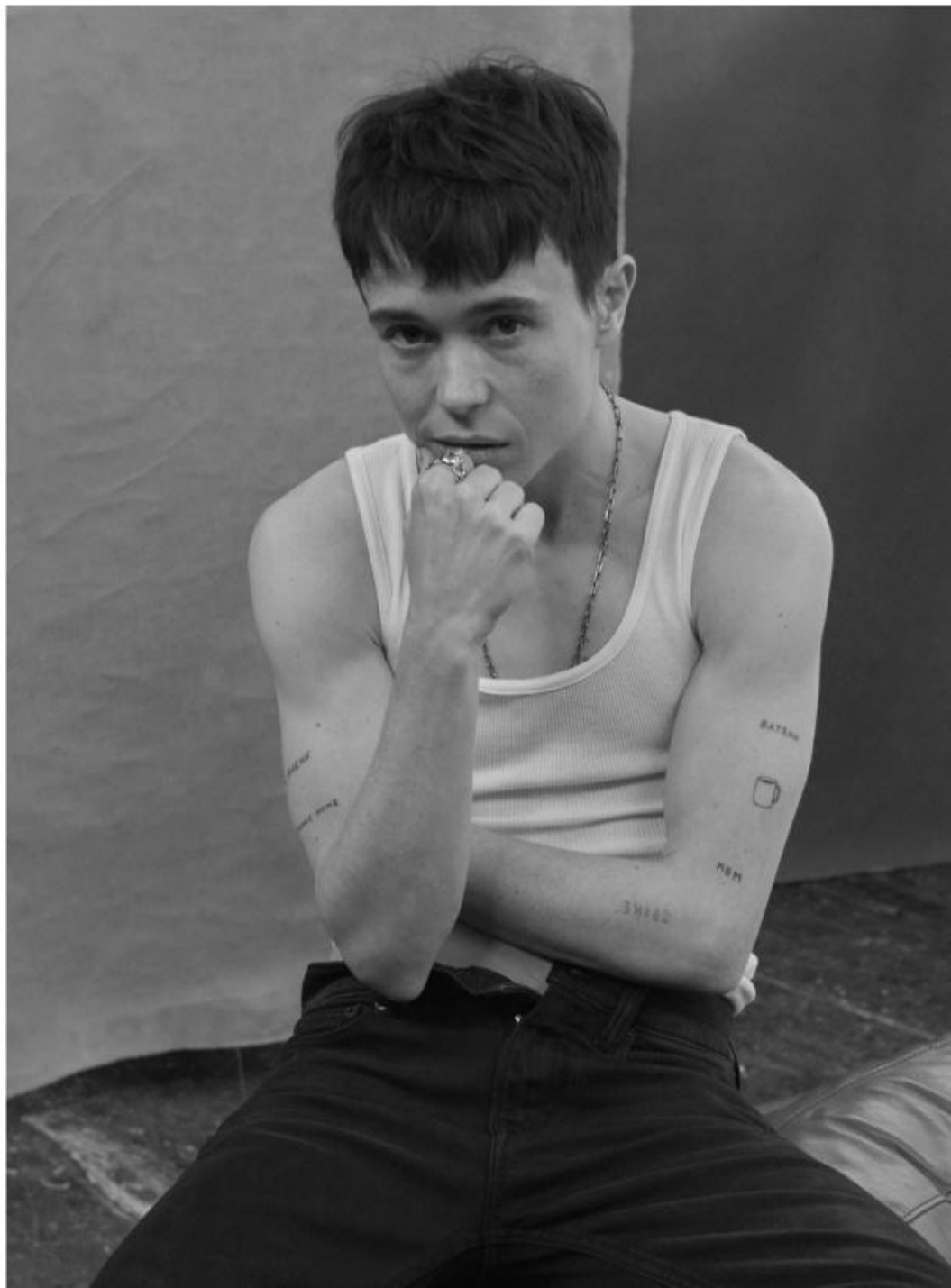
Why are people making it more difficult? It really breaks my heart. It *really* breaks my *heart*. That's literally all we're trying to communicate. That's what's so funny to me. When people say, *Cancel this. Cancel that.* No, they get four more comedy specials, and J. K. Rowling has a jillion followers! The people getting canceled are the trans people who are suffering, or killing themselves, or murdered.

I often find that it's the media that does it. People can actually be communicating in a way that isn't aggressive, but then suddenly it's all about creating this *tension,* and then *this* person doubles down on *that!* And, like: No. It's a conversation—which, by the way, is what you're saying you're asking for.

Jokes have an impact that hurts people. I understand that people might think it doesn't. I understand that they're not meaning to. But: It's not a joke. It's not a joke. You believe what you're saying. You believe it. It's not a joke. They believe it. It's clearly not a joke. And all we're saying is: Can you just please listen and understand the harm that it causes? That's all we're trying to say. That is *literally* all we are trying to say. And then we get *inundated* with hatred for saying it. But I'm sorry: *You* are the ones who don't want to have the conversation. *You* are the ones who are so sensitive, who can't handle people saying, Hey, can you not do that?

I've seen on social media members of my family, who I don't talk to, who have never been more passionate in communicating about a cause or upset with the government. And it just so reeks of privilege, and this

This page: Tank by **Polo Ralph Lauren;** jeans by **Ralph Lauren Purple Label;** ring by **the Great Frog.** Opposite: Jacket and trousers, **Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello;** T-shirt, stylist's own; two-finger ring by **Sterling Assault;** ring by **the Great Frog;** vintage boots, available at **Stock Vintage, NYC;** socks by **Falke.**



I think of times when people actively were like, "No, you need to wear a dress" in very, very, very pivotal moments. I remember the premiere of *Juno* at the Toronto International Film Festival. Previously, doing press for *Hard Candy,* or when I went to Sundance for a film, I didn't know the concept of, like, a *stylist*. I grew up working in Canada! It's different. I dressed how I wanted to dress—not dissimilar to now. And I remember going and having the thing I wanted to wear, and then understanding the degree of expectation of how fancy someone is supposed to look. So I said I wanted to wear a suit, and Fox Searchlight was basically like, "No, you need to wear a dress." And they took me in a big rush to one of those fancy stores on Bloor Street. They had me wear a dress, and . . . *that was that*. And then all the *Juno* press, all the photo shoots—Michael Cera was in slacks and sneakers. I look back at the photos, and I'm like . . . ?

And it's easy for people to roll their eyes, but you know what? No. That was really extremely, extremely fucked up. I shouldn't have to treat it like just this thing that happened—this somewhat normal thing. It's like: *No.* Regardless of me being trans! I've had people who've apologized about things: "Sorry, I didn't know, I didn't know at the time." *It doesn't matter!* It doesn't matter if I'm trans or cis. Lots of cis women dress how I dress. That has nothing to fucking do with it.

It's really funny, since the book announcement, I've had three random, suspiciously timed apologies pop up. Interesting timing.

People, especially teenage girls, *really* responded to that character, Juno. The clothing—which was just me taking a producer to used-clothing stores in Vancouver. The vibe—something that was, if not *non*existent . . . it was *new* for a film that reached the audience it reached, and with her as

Jacket and jeans, **Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello.**

PRODUCTION BY **ROGER INNISS**
AT BOOM PRODUCTIONS INC.
SET DESIGN BY **CHARLOTTE MALMLÖF.**
HAIR BY **THOM PRIANO.**
GROOMING BY **FRANKIE BOYD**
FOR TOM FORD. TAILORING BY
JOSEPH TING.

anger that gets indulged. Government conspiracy theories. And someone reposted a TERF article. I've seen them supporting right-wing, horrible, xenophobic, transphobic–publicly calling transgender people a fad. It's at a point where it's serious, proper brainwashing. Full-blown. It's really scary.

Because of course you look at Twitter. How could you not? But when I see these people in my family, what they're sharing? It's deeply chilling. And then I realize, gosh, if this was all you were looking at, how would you know otherwise?

Listen to me, it's embarrassing–like I've been spying. But everybody does it, right? We look at our exes' shit–it's what we do.

I love hockey. I don't really have a team, I just love watching it. When I lived in L. A., I'd go to Kings games and cheer for the Kings. But if Toronto came, I'd cheer for both. I was at a sports bar last night watching the NBA playoffs, Memphis versus Minnesota. I'm not someone who is a die-hard fan of a team. Is that strange? I keep meaning to become one. Every year I say this is the year I'm picking a team and I'm staying with that team. And I never do it.

I could still skate. It's been ages, but I'd be fine. I was probably on skates at three. On a pond. Back when things froze.

Liverpool is my mum's team. She knows all the players, the coach, the drama, everything. Her number-one bucket-list thing was to go to a Liverpool game. I was doing press for season 1 of *Umbrella Academy* in London. There was a Liverpool game. I reached out to the team and said I wanted to bring my mum to a game. They were so incredibly welcoming and kind. I brought my mum over and surprised her. Getting to watch her be at that game was truly one of the most absolute special moments in my life. In the beginning, when everyone is singing, she's just swaying and singing. I have it on video. When the game was over, they took her down to see the field and the seats where the players sit. She got to meet the coach. Seeing my mum happy makes me so happy.

Alexander Chee's–maybe you've read it–*How to Write an Autobiographical Novel*? *Ohhhhhh*. It's so good.

My mother was born in the fifties. She was a minister's daughter. You know? She definitely didn't want me to be queer. That's where there was a lot of challenge, for years. Until I was in my twenties. But I love her so much, and I totally understand, and forgive. I have a mother who loves me, and not everybody has that.

Forgiveness? Depends on the situation. There are a couple people I don't forgive. I don't know what this thing is about always having to forgive. I don't wish them harm, but I shouldn't feel obligated or forced to forgive them. Maybe at some point, but there are a couple people I don't, and I don't feel bad about it. And there are other people who, absolutely. Of course.

Do you know the book *Split Tooth,* by Tanya Tagaq? It's one of the best things I've ever read. Amazing. Amazing. Amazing. Amazing. The last two pages of her book are just this whole beautiful piece about: I don't want to forgive. But I forgive myself. I'll pick it up every once in a while just to read that.

Kids? No. I feel like I've also had to take care of myself so much. I'm obsessed with my dog. That's my kid. I'm good with that. I mean, if I met someone who had a kid, I'm not completely closed off to the idea that maybe when I'm older, I could adopt a kid who's older, you know. But no.

For me, euphoria is simply the act of waking up, making my coffee, and sitting down with a book and being able to read. I know that may sound strange, but I can't stress enough the degree of discomfort and struggle that I was experiencing that got in the way of everything. How could it not?

There is a universality to that. We've all experienced similar versions. It would be so nice, the more and more we can realize how much we're all in this together. The same kind of stuff that comes at me is not *not* affecting cis people and making cis people be confined in spaces that are expected of them. This affects us all.

Dinner tonight? Good question. I do have some veggies and stuff. I have fennel, broccoli. . . .

(RE)IMAGINING VIKTOR

By Thomas Page McBee

AMID RISING LEGISLATIVE, rhetorical, and physical violence against trans people by those who insisted we're destroying the very fabric of civilization, Elliot Page disclosed he is transgender–and, overnight, became the face of transmasculinity the world over. He also confirmed he'd remain in his role on Netflix's wildly popular superhero series *The Umbrella Academy*. It was a relief to many fans, who raised an important question: Would he "play cis," or would his character transition alongside him? As a trans man whose own transition was delayed by erroneous, absent, and harmful representation, I hoped for the latter. According to GLAAD, trans men and boys are remarkably underrepresented on television: There were only fourteen transmasculine characters in the 2021-22 television season across all networks.

I've known Elliot since 2018, when we met on the set of Netflix's *Tales of the City,* for which I was a writer. Days after making his announcement, Elliot introduced me to Steve Blackman, the showrunner of *The Umbrella Academy*. Steve was passionate about incorporating Elliot's real-life transition into the show. It was right for the actor as well as the character because it deepened existing themes, Steve told me. The only problem? The scripts were locked. Season 3 was delicately arced out, and they were set to go into production in less than two weeks. The job would be to graft a transition story over the intricate plotting of an ensemble show.

Headaches aside, the upshot was celebratory news. Elliot's character would become Viktor Hargreeves, making that character the most high-profile transgender man on TV.

Anyway, the time and narrative constraints presented a unique opportunity. Because Elliot was returning to the screen in an established role and with a fully fleshed-out character arc that intersected with every aspect of the show, his story required that his transness exist as a texture, not a defining character trait. The creative obstacles didn't stop there. The events of season 3 pick up immediately after season 2, so Viktor could not have come to this realization about himself between seasons. Instead, his becoming would need to happen within the first episodes, and without the hand-holding usually provided for cisgender audiences. He was, like all trans people, always already himself–whether his siblings on the show, or the viewers watching, knew it or not.

Like life, I mean.

Trans people often know we are trans long before we disclose that information to others. We have goals that don't revolve around being trans. We have family drama unrelated to our gender identities, strengths and flaws that span the whole of our lives. By necessity, this was an opportunity to show a transition so organic, so fundamental to the character, that it could only work in concert with the existing character arcs, not eclipse them. Elliot and I had a long conversation about when and how Viktor may have come to discover his gender identity, and in what ways he might embody that identity in season 3. Steve and I used Elliot's insights as a jumping-off point to form and neatly overlay an economical narrative on those existing scenes–one that echoed where Elliot was in his own transition process at the time of shooting. Because Steve had an encyclopedic knowledge of the cis characters on the show, he helped flesh out how the family might react to their brother's news.

The result of our work is truer than true in many key ways. In this story, being trans is a context, a coming into focus, a sharpening of perspective that will only deepen the connection millions of viewers already have to Viktor and his family. And because of this, the truest truth of all shines through: On *The Umbrella Academy,* Elliot Page plays a transgender man who, like most trans people I know, isn't working to destroy the world but to save it.

how we dad now

Dads have made damn good progress.

We're more involved than ever; we understand the assignment. ***But let's not pat ourselves on the back.*** Certainly not as we claw our way out of a pandemic that's altered everything about the way we live our lives. ***It's high time to ask the knotty questions about raising kids,*** the ones you've only dared to ponder with your partner or your closest friends or even just yourself. Because, let's be honest, parenting is as terrifying as it is joyful, and ***sometimes you worry so much that you might just pee your pants.*** So we did just that. (Posed the questions, not peed ourselves—yet.) The answers we received, on the pages that follow, ***will teach you a thing or two***—the good, the bad, the meconium-tinged ugly—***about what it means to be a caring, supportive, badass dad today.***

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFFREY WESTBROOK

DO I NEED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN MY CHILD AND MY PASSIONS?

How does parenting change you when you've built your life around climbing rock cliffs without a rope? We asked Alex Honnold, star of the 2018 documentary *Free Solo,* who became a father for the first time in February.

—JEFF GORDINIER

WHAT'S HARDER, FREE SOLOING OR PARENTING?

I would say that I'm less equipped for parenting so far. I just have a lot less practice. But soloing I've been doing a long time. Honestly, the whole process has given me a lot more respect for all parents.

YOUR DAUGHTER'S NAMED JUNE AND WAS BORN IN FEBRUARY…

Yeah, it's confusing.

DO YOU PLAN TO TAKE HER UP ON CLIMBS?

We've been doing a lot of sport climbing: You hike to a cliff, then set up a picnic area at the cliff. She's been coming to the cliff a fair amount, but she's not going up. She mostly naps. She's two months old. She can barely hold her neck up. But as soon as she's able to walk, we'll be taking her scrambling and things. At the base of these cliffs are boulders and other perfect things for kids to play on. Like, as soon as she's able to move, she'll be playing on rocks.

WHAT IF JUNE ISN'T REALLY INTO THAT?

My wife and I talk about that. Obviously, we just want her to be passionate about something. No matter what, I want her at least to be confident outdoors. She's going to be a competent hiker and feel comfortable in the wilderness. She's gonna at least learn all the basics of rockcraft. Like, she has to know how to belay. That's a bare minimum. And know how to rappel. And do all the things with ropes. But if she's not passionate about climbing, that's fine. As long as there's something she's excited about, I'll be happy.

Am I a Dork Just Because I'm a Dad?

BY DREW MAGARY

I AM A DAD, WHICH MEANS I'm a constant source of derision for my family. Some of my T-shirts are, like, an inch too short, which means my hairy belly pokes out when I have to reach up to change a lightbulb. I offer live commentary on other drivers' terrible road manners while I'm carpooling kids to soccer practice. ("Look at this guy in the BMW. What's he think he's doin'?") I use a million napkins when I eat. I still listen to Def Leppard with incredible zeal. I provide memes to this household so reliably that you could fucking chart them.

This used to bother me, and occasionally it still does. I grew up in the late seventies and early eighties, near the blessed end of an era when fathers were defined as men who were strong, capable, and taciturn. The sheriffs of their households. "Just wait till your father gets home," etc. I wanted to be that kind of dad: a dad you didn't fuck with. I wanted to be taken seriously.

But there's a word for men who demand to be taken seriously, and that word is *asshole*.

If you're a dad who can't take a light jab and is constantly demanding subservience from those you love, are you really that strong? Are you that loving? Who the fuck are you even trying to impress? A good dad, a modern dad, embraces all the dorky-dad stereotypes with good cheer. He does his duties—working, cleaning, cooking, driving, installing car seats, deinstalling car seats, etc.—without objection, and he doesn't give a bare fuck how he looks while he does them. Because if you're so wrapped up in how you believe a dad should behave, you're not really of much use to anybody. And, above all else, dads have to be useful: the guy everyone calls on when they need a laugh, or when they need to reach a high shelf, or when the house is literally on fire.

So go ahead and laugh at me when I'm changing out a ceiling fan with my ass crack on display. Chuckle at my music selections in the car. Cover your ears when I'm eating ribs. I'm here to provide you with all of the Phil Dunphy-esque laughs you require, and more.

That's why I'm here. That's why I'm good at this job.

Drew Magary is the author of, most recently, The Night the Lights Went Out: A Memoir of Life After Brain Damage.

COURTESY SUBJECT (HONNOLD). MARTIN PARR/MAGNUM PHOTOS (DAD WITH LION).

CAN I BE A HOT DAD?

BY ALLISON P. DAVIS

LISTEN, DADS ARE HOT. Them's the rules. I don't make them. I'm just a rule follower. Dad hotness has been proven by evolutionary biologists and social psychologists (the science community has disregarded mom hotness as a legitimate field of study, but we'll save that for another day) and by me. Show me a man with the emotional intelligence to raise a child and I'm done.

So it's nothing new to notice that dads be hot daddin', but specificity is key, and recently, among the many hot-dad varietals, I have homed in on my type: the Soccer Dad.

Each Sunday, my niece, who is the next Megan Rapinoe, plays soccer with other girls between the ages of eight and ten who seem to think they're the next Megan Rapinoes, but they're not. Week after week, I offer to come—to cheer for my niece, but also because the sidelines are my own personal Hot Dad World Cup.

I'm not interested in the Ted Lasso wannabes: the dad carrying a backpack filled with all of his daughter's favorite snacks; the dad with a fully loaded iPad, to occupy the tagalong siblings, and enough blankets for the whole brood; the coach dad, who carries hair ties in his pocket to help with high ponytails. We get it: When men demonstrate parenting skills, we've been socially conditioned to label it "exceptionally hot dad characteristics" instead of just what people do.

No, I'm there for the Roy Kents. I'm eyeing the dads who, to most interested parties, make the soccer pitch seem like a risky hunting ground: the mean ones, the temperamental egoists with zero self-control. The dad who loves to fight the ref's every call. The dad who always shows up in a matching Adidas tracksuit—like, Bill Buford couldn't have found a more perfect soccer hooligan. The Lee Pace look-alike who rolls up each week on a motorcycle wearing the same helmet-and-Ray-Bans combo as his daughter and uses his position as assistant coach to make sure she never leaves the field. (I swear he's trying to kill me.) And the short king with the British accent who can't seem to stop himself from howling about his daughter's footwork. Every time he leans over and mutters some shit talk about the other players' lack of skill, I get a glimpse of his ring finger: still nothing on it. Jackpot.

It's mildly disturbing how effectively these impulsive men light up both my uterus and my loins. It's the raw passion, out there for all to see. The dominance. The testosterone-filled exhibition of MAN in the context of something so low-stakes and, frankly, adorable. That's what gets me: these hotheaded Soccer Dads displaying the feral parts of the alpha male that most appeal to my base attraction, minus all the more problematic attributes of alpha-maleness.

Suddenly I am the biggest *fútbol* fan. Olé, olé, olé for the Soccer Dad. Or, should I say, Soccer Zaddy?

Allison P. Davis, a culture writer for The Cut, is the author of the upcoming book Horny.

THE SEX LIVES OF NEW PARENTS

What to expect after the expected arrives

Up to **4** weeks post-birth

very few couples report intercourse, masturbation, or cunnilingus…

though **1/3**

engage in fellatio.

By **12** weeks post-birth

intercourse resumes for most couples.

By **12** months post-birth

sexual activity returns to pre-pregnancy levels.

MIAMIPIXX/VAEM/BACKGRID. SOURCE FOR DATA: *THE JOURNAL OF SEX RESEARCH.*

CAN I CONNECT WITH MY KIDS WHEN DUTY CALLS?

Reynaldo Peña is the football coach at Northwest High in Clarksville, Tennessee. (Go Vikings!) He served for thirteen years in the U. S. Army, rising to staff sergeant and deploying twice to Iraq. He's thirty-seven now, with two kids—a daughter, twelve, and a son, nine. He spoke to Esquire about building a connection with your child even when you're separated by great distance, starting with making sure they understand why you had to go away in the first place. —Jack Holmes

MY WIFE WAS SIX months pregnant when I left for my first deployment, in 2007. I got a couple weeks of R&R when she was any-day-now. I returned home late at night, and when I woke up, my wife was like, "My water broke." If I got home a day later, she would have already had the baby. God works in mysterious ways. Two weeks later, I went back to northern Iraq.

When I got back from the war, it absolutely was an adjustment. When we arrived at Fort Riley, Kansas, there was a five-minute ceremony and then we found our families. My baby daughter reacted like I was a stranger. She started crying, like, "I don't know you."

I was overjoyed to see my family, but it was very difficult, especially after all the excitement went away. They had already developed a rhythm, and I wrecked that whole schedule. I was trying my best to have a connection with my daughter, and it paid off, because she is a remarkable young lady now. But at the time, I just wanted to make sure I wasn't doing anything wrong.

She was too young at the time to remember all that. But less than a year later, I left for my second deployment. And that's the one she remembers. It was tough. There were days when I couldn't call, I couldn't Skype. My family didn't always know if I was okay.

Sometimes I think about those times away from home. I missed a lot—Christmases, Thanksgivings, birthdays—and I can't get them back. But when you have a good foundation with your kids and they get old enough to ask, "Why'd you have to leave?" they can at least understand. The young generation, they want to know the whys.

Does My Kid Like My Quirks?

BY RACHEL SYME

ABOUT A DECADE AGO, when my father, William Syme—a now-retired stomach surgeon—was in his late fifties, he decided one day that he absolutely must learn how to play the banjo. This was not out of some vague dad-rock impulse to learn the folk songs he listened to on NPR, or because he particularly loved complex Americana harmonies. It was because he wanted to jam.

My father has never been content to simply appreciate; he needs to *experience*. This has been his MO for my entire life. He is a thrower of gauntlets, a free-roving nerd who takes up new hobbies with all the fervor and devotion of a young nun. He has been, over the years, intensely into ska music (porkpie hats and jerky dance moves), rock climbing (carabiners everywhere), and single-malt Scotches (complete with dramatic overpronunciations of *Glenfiddich* and *Laphroaig*). When I was in elementary school, he spent a summer building model planes out of balsa wood and launching them in local parks. I remember nothing so acutely about this period as the sadness and crumpled effort that accompanied a crash landing.

And then came the banjo. I don't know if you've ever been around someone learning how to play the banjo, but it is like getting dental work done while *Deliverance* plays in the background. We all thought it would be a temporary phase. But the banjo stuck, because my dad longed to be good enough that he could actually be a part of something, to finally have a hobby that he didn't pursue alone while we all rolled our eyes and wondered what was coming next. Now he attends a bluegrass camp in the summers, where he warbles old-timey songs about rivers and gold.

What I have learned from my dad—a man who will captivate an entire wedding by gyrating and doing high kicks while wearing a formal bow tie—is a kind of pragmatic hedonism. Even though it is a classic "aw, Dad" trope to be far too into your hobbies, by truly diving in headfirst, you are teaching your children about following their passions down the rabbit hole. He has taught me a rare lesson: If you are going to become obsessed with something, do it all the way. Go so hard you almost crash. Sometimes your planes end up in pieces. Then pick yourself up and do it again. Learn new things, constantly. Just make sure you give your family earplugs.

Rachel Syme, a staff writer for The New Yorker, *grew up in Albuquerque and now resides in Brooklyn.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIAN FINKE

IS THERE ANY HOPE FOR PATERNITY LEAVE?

WHEN IT COMES TO paternity leave, 'Murica lags behind much of the rest of the world. The federal government guarantees exactly zero days of paid time off (though it allows us up to twelve weeks' unpaid leave, so . . . thanks?); a handful of companies and just ten states have risen to the occasion. The result is that only 5 percent of fathers in the U. S. take two or more weeks off after the birth of their child. Alexis Ohanian—a cofounder of Reddit, husband of Serena Williams, and, along with groups like the nonprofit PL+US, a tireless advocate for a federal family-leave policy—makes the case for why even the busiest dads should have the right to spend time with their newborns. —Daniel Dumas

WHEN DID YOU FIRST REALIZE OUR APPROACH TO PATERNITY LEAVE NEEDS TO CHANGE?

The switch flipped in 2017, when Serena had a difficult childbirth with life-threatening complications. There was no way I would want anyone to go through something like that and think, *Do I stay here with my wife and newborn or do I go back to work?*

DO YOU THINK TAKING THAT TIME IMPACTED YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR DAUGHTER TODAY?

It undoubtedly created strong bonds with not just my daughter but with my wife. Me being able to rise to that occasion—changing diapers, feeding, cleaning, because paid leave was an option for me at Reddit, where I was the executive chairman at the time—meant a better health outcome for Serena and our daughter. At Reddit, we'd recently hired the first real HR person in our then decade of existence, and one of the table stakes for her, to get and retain the very best talent, had been a great family-leave plan. If we could encourage men to take advantage of it as often as women did, then we'd destigmatize an issue women face in the workforce. It would remove that element of the bias. And I'd thought at the time, *Okay, this is important.* When my daughter was born, I took full use of it.

LAST FALL, YOU PUBLICLY CRITICIZED PALANTIR COFOUNDER JOE LONSDALE FOR CALLING MEN WHO TAKE FAMILY LEAVE "LOSERS."

As a society, we've crippled the confidence of men like Joe. Part of the reason I've been advocating as loudly as I have is because I want other men to have the confidence to take that time. For folks who want to have outsized impacts on the world, it is about understanding the whys. Why do the things you do? Why go to work? For many people, myself included, it is the legacy you're leaving behind for the little human you've produced. I've gotten to know some really successful men over the years, and eventually this topic comes up. And not a single one of them has ever said, "Gosh, I wish I spent less time with my kids."

THE LAME STATE OF FAMILY LEAVE IN AMERICA

More than half of countries worldwide offer paid paternity leave. The U. S. is not one of them.

109 countries
offer national paid paternity leave.

16 weeks
is the average length of paid paternity leave for those who have it.

47 countries
offer more than four weeks' leave.

20 countries
have options for leaves of more than a year.

IS GRANDDADDING AS RAD AS THEY SAY?

Andy García, the new *Father of the Bride,* says yes

BY GABE ULLA

"I'M ABOUT TO be the father of the bride times three," Andy García says about his summer plans. Two of the actor and his wife Marivi's four children, Daniella and Dominik, are getting married. Daniella recently gave birth to a baby girl; both she and Dominik live near their parents in Los Angeles. Another daughter, Alessandra, lives in New York, and their son, Andrés, lives in New Orleans. "Marivi and I are back to making pureed vegetables and compotas and changing diapers," García says.

Plus, he's starring in the title role of the *Father of the Bride* remake, out June 16. He plays Billy Herrera, a Miami architect and a rule-the-roost patriarch in the antiquated mold who strongly disapproves of his daughter's fiancé, a billionaire heir who, among other perceived transgressions, dared to propose without first seeking Billy's permission. To say the least, Billy is unmoored by this development. "I'm definitely more modern and more open," García says, comparing his and Billy's approaches to parenting. "Alessandra came to a screening and told me, 'Dad, you are nothing like that guy.' "

24.1%
of American men are grandfathers.

As for García's approach, his North Star has always been his father, a distinguished attorney in prerevolutionary Havana who fled with his family to Miami in the early sixties and went on to build a successful fragrance business. "My dad was someone who would defend his family and friends at all costs," García says. "I am a product of the bravery of people like him and my mother, people who had everything taken from them and had to make their way in a completely new world." García's parents taught him that the key to raising kids is living by your word. "Never forget that kids are sponges for both the good and the bad," he says. You can impart all the values you wish, but "if it doesn't ring true, your children will be the first to tell you, 'Don't hit me with that shit, Dad.' "

When García and I speak, the family is getting ready for Daniella's bridal shower. Alessandra is already in town. "The house still fills up from time to time, but then you wake up one morning and realize they are all gone again, and it gets very quiet," García says. "It takes some getting used to."

Gabe Ulla is the coauthor of David Chang's best-selling memoir, Eat a Peach. *He lives in New York City.*

GETTY IMAGES (WILLIAMS AND OHANIAN). COURTESY WARNER BROS (GARCÍA). SOURCES FOR DATA: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU; WORLD POLICY ANALYSIS CENTER, UCLA.

WHAT IF MY KID DOESN'T FIT MY EXPECTATIONS?

I LOVE MY DAD, who lives in Tennessee, but we are about as dissimilar as two similar people can get. Same personality, but with totally different interests. I'd always wanted to ask him how he'd reconciled his expectations of fatherhood and the reality of me. Recently, I did just that. —JUSTIN KIRKLAND

WHAT IS IT THAT YOU HOPED FOR AS A DAD?

I guess what every dad wants: a good kid who is going to be like you. Better than you. When I grew up, it was different. My dad taught me how not to be a dad. I wanted to be the best I could be, and to make you and your brother the best you could be.

YOU'VE SAID YOU THOUGHT HUNTING AND FISHING WOULD BE THE WAY TO KEEP US TOGETHER.

You tried it, and it wasn't your thing. I wanted you to keep going until you killed a deer, to see if that would do it for you. That was my destination in life: to hunt and to fish, and to enjoy what I loved. And I'd hoped you would get into it like me and that that would keep you and me together.

WE'RE CLOSE NOW, THOUGH. SO WHAT DID YOU FIND IN PLACE OF THAT?

Your success. If we had it to do all over again, I'd want you to take the same route you took. If I'd had your ass in the woods, or in a boat on a lake, it would've taken away from where you're at now.

I ALSO FEEL LIKE A KEY PART OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WAS BONDING OVER THE TV AND MUSIC AND MOVIES YOU RAISED ME ON.

Because of you, I got to go to college. I got to grow. I think it was me giving in, and you giving in. I like Adele. I like some of these chick flicks that you and I have watched. If you hadn't turned me on to them by saying, "Dad, you need to watch this; this is ass-kicking," I probably wouldn't have seen them. You took me to see *Waitress* in New York, a city that I'd never thought I'd end up in. That was your version of a fishing trip. You took me to your lake, to your woods.

WHEN I CAME OUT AS GAY, IT REALLY TESTED OUR RELATIONSHIP. HOW DID YOU EVOLVE WITH THAT?

I was selfish thinking about me and what I wanted from you, not what you wanted. I never stopped to think if you were happy. And that's where I changed. I had to stop and go, "Dude, you can't control somebody else's life and them be happy and you be happy. I can't make that call."

HOW WILL MY KIDS MEMORIALIZE ME?

By Brady Langmann

My father died this March after a long struggle with COPD. He would either cut up or cringe at the thought of a copy-paste job on a funeral home's website still stuck in 1998, so the morning after he died, I asked the funeral director if I could write his obituary. The look on his face said I was being a pain in the ass. He needed it by the end of the afternoon. Sweet. I had a few hours to answer a question usually saved for decades on a shrink's lounger: How will I remember my father?

I went to a coffee shop and stared at a screen for a long time. Can't stress this enough—he'd died about eighteen hours before then. No matter how prepared you are, there's an immediate shell shock. My brain was grief-mush. In that state, trying to pour a life into a couple paragraphs feels like trying to etch the plot of *The Godfather* into stone off the top of your head. It's your favorite story. Probably the best one, from where you're standing. But what you're writing is permanent and you're never, ever going to get it all right from memory. I read about a dozen shitty examples, right down to the existentially terrifying WikiHow entry, until I realized it was impossible. So I wrote about who Dad was on his best day. I wrote about his smile, "the one he'd get when he was about to start cutting up." I laid out what you'd do with my father if you spent a day with him: drive to get a hoagie, ABBA on the radio, go home and laugh at a movie. I figured that if a stranger could get a sense of him from reading it, then maybe Dad would be proud.

I've gotta say, though—I blacked out in that coffee shop. So reading his obituary now is like reading nothing else. I don't think the words are mine, or even of me. It's him, he's there, living and breathing on that shitty website more than he is in the graveyard of a Polish church. I reread it, again and again, until he animates.

HAVING CHILDREN INCREASES YOUR LIFE SPAN...

...though not equitably

2
years:
the increased life expectancy at age sixty for men with at least one child.

74
weeks:
the average life-span increase for fathers of daughters.

0
weeks:
the average life-span increase for fathers of sons.

COURTESY DISNEY+ (*THE MANDALORIAN*). COURTESY FX NETWORKS (*ATLANTA*). SOURCES FOR DATA: *JOURNAL OF EPIDEMIOLOGY & COMMUNITY HEALTH; AMERICAN JOURNAL OF HUMAN BIOLOGY.*

WHO'S IN THE NEW CLASS OF TV DADS?

Thirty years after Danny Tanner and Carl Winslow taught us the virtues and joys of fatherhood, the dads of television today are facing more relatable daddy issues. Divorce! Money problems! A rowdy infant alien imbued with the Force! Here are five modern television fathers who, taken together, embody parenting in the here and now. —B.L.

THE FOSTER DAD

DIN DJARIN

THE MANDALORIAN

Played by: Pedro Pascal

Star Wars' great small-screen conquest improbably began with an adoption: A Mandalorian crosses paths with a green, Yoda-eared baby. TV doesn't have a more hilarious take on (foster) fatherhood.

THE (NEARLY) ABSENT DAD

EARN MARKS

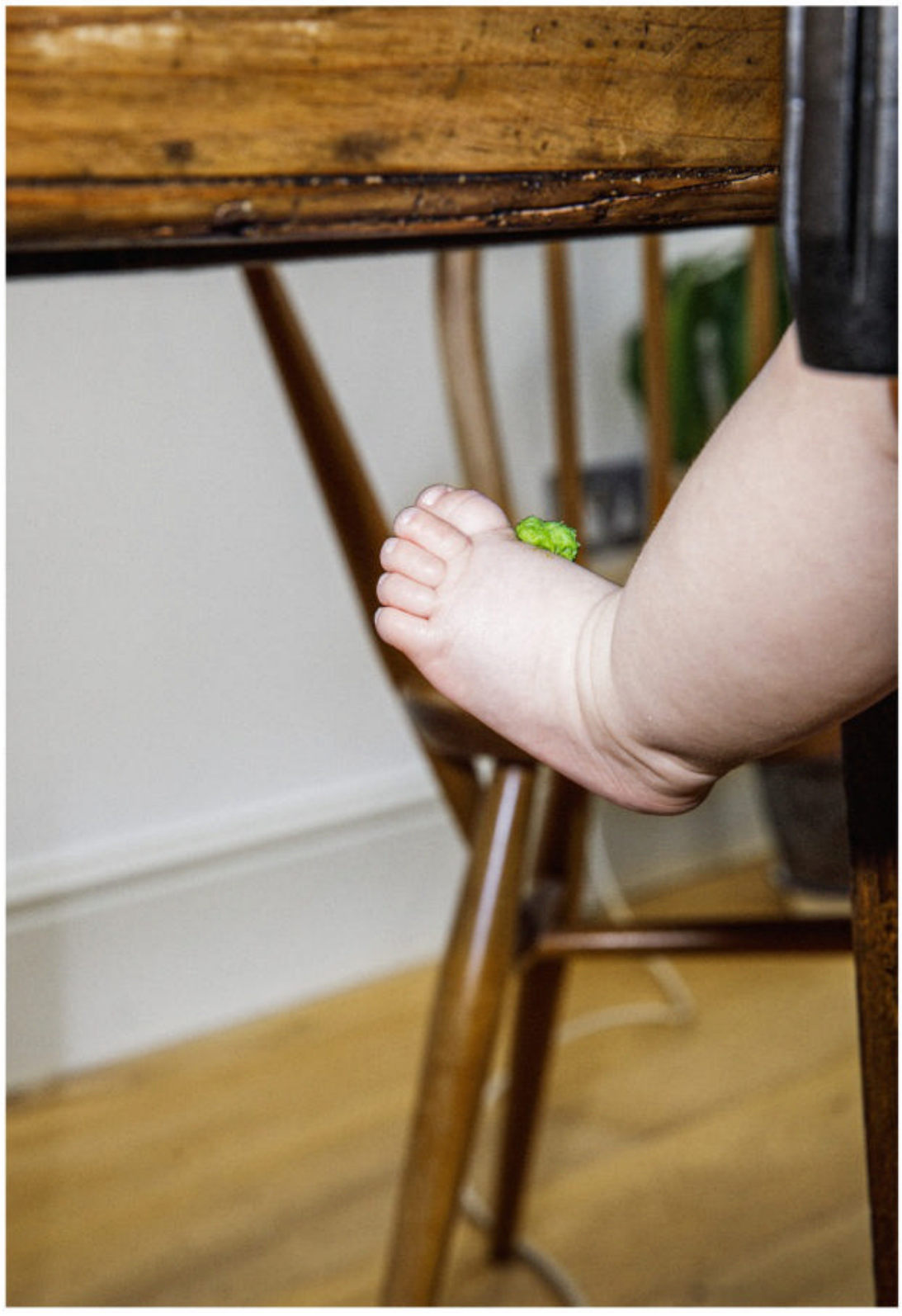
ATLANTA

Played by: Donald Glover

We hardly see never-not-hustling music manager Earn with his daughter, Lottie—but she fuels everything he fights for. In the rare times they're together, we glimpse one of TV's most touching portraits of fatherhood.

Is It Okay Not to Like My Kid Sometimes?

BY JEFF GORDINIER



"WHAT'S THAT?" JASPER ASKED.

"It's cheese!" I said.

My heart swelled with hope. We were eating at a restaurant whose menu nods toward the Iberian Peninsula, and Jasper had eyed a thin wedge of manchego. *Maybe he'll like this,* I thought. Jasper nibbled, leaned forward, and spit the saliva-glazed cheese onto the tabletop.

My hope gave way to confusion, embarrassment, a whisper of muted anger. Jasper and I have a complicated relationship. He's just four years old, but the dude knows how to push my buttons. Kids are telepathic that way. Jasper's signature move is to receive a plate of food that I have meticulously, lovingly cooked for him and to dump it on the floor. Sure, it's funny from afar. When you're in the middle of it—well, sometimes I have to step outside and stand on the front stoop and take twenty deep breaths before I go back to work.

I have four children, ranging in age from nineteen to four. Here's something I have learned about parenting: No matter how open-minded you think you are, your kids will throw you curveballs that undermine your fixed ideas about the world. Philip Larkin had it only half right. The kids fuck up the parents, too. Which is why it was probably inevitable: I am a food writer who has traveled around the world in an endless quest for epiphanies of flavor, and somehow I fathered a picky eater.

I can spoon seaweed and pickles and salsa and smoked fish into the mouth of Wesley, Jasper's twin brother, and Wesley will do a grinning dance of joy. Jasper's palate, however, remains fixed in the bland middle of the dairy spectrum. He likes milk. He likes yogurt. He likes American cheese, but nothing more pungent than that. He loves white bread with cold pats of butter on top—don't even toast the bread unless you're in the mood for a tantrum.

I love Jasper unconditionally, but this behavior is bewildering to me—and to the extended Gordinier brood. Flavor matters to us. Flavor unlocks an understanding of, and an appreciation for, the world. When I was a kid, my father took my family to San Francisco from Los Angeles largely so that we could experience the minced squab in lettuce cups at the Mandarin. For a Gordinier, being a picky eater is a cardinal sin, but I hold on to hope.

"What's that?" Jasper asked the other day.

"It's a pepita," I said. I slipped it into his hand. He popped it into his mouth. Then Jasper uttered the magic word: "Yum."

As it goes for any father who's utterly stumped by his offspring, it's up to me to build a bridge to Jasper in the years to come. Maybe that bridge begins with a pumpkin seed.

THE BAD DAD

CAL JACOBS

EUPHORIA

Played by: Eric Dane

Jacob Elordi's (fictional) *Euphoria* father is certainly no saint—the man peed on his family's welcome mat last season. But with his deep-seated reasons for turning out so vile, he represents TV's new complicated dad.

THE GROUNDED DAD

MOHAN VISHWAKUMAR

NEVER HAVE I EVER

Played by: Sendhil Ramamurthy

Morally, Netflix's resident dad is the sturdiest of the lot, even if he died before the pilot begins. He appears in his daughter's dreams, showing her how to appreciate McEnroe's tennis game. (And, you know, to grieve.)

THE ADORKABLE DAD

TED LASSO

TED LASSO

Played by: Jason Sudeikis

Okay, here's the new-age Danny Tanner: our favorite football coach turned soccer coach. Lasso cracks dad jokes so *dad* they make most dads cringe.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEREMY LIEBMAN

COURTESY WARNER MEDIA (*EUPHORIA*). COURTESY NETFLIX (*NEVER HAVE I EVER*). COURTESY APPLE TV+ (*TED LASSO*).

WHY DO SOME DADS HAVE THE URGE TO KEEP MAKING KIDS?

WHY DO CERTAIN MEN feel compelled to continue procreating at an age when most of their contemporaries are puttering toward retirement? We asked legendary South American chef Francis Mallmann, who has seven children from four different relationships. —J. G.

YOU HAVE SEVEN CHILDREN. WHY?

The joy of growing together. The process of holding their hands as they grow.

HOW OLD ARE THEY?

They range in age from three to forty-two.

ARE YOU A DIFFERENT DAD TO CHILD #7 THAN YOU WERE WITH CHILD #1?

Luckily, I'm not a fossil yet. I evolve, I change. I'm not the father I was when I was twenty-four—and yet I'm not quite ready for being eighty. I'm sixty-six and doing my best for all of them. My children are not an experiment—they are my joy, my path, my blood, my most true mirror. They've been the most beautiful erosion of my heart, sanding it day in and day out with flowers and music at the edge of doubts and understanding.

WHERE HAVE YOU SUCCEEDED AS A FATHER?

As a provider of peace with my thoughts.

WHERE HAVE YOU FAILED AS A FATHER?

As a provider of peace with their thoughts.

DO YOU ATTRACT CRITICISM FROM PEOPLE FOR HAVING FATHERED SO MANY CHILDREN?

I don't care. Only enemies tell the truth.

30.9

is the average age of a father with a newborn.

3.2%

*of fathers of newborns are between the ages of 45 and 54.**

0.3%

*of fathers of newborns are 55 or older.**

**In cases where the age of the father is known.*

ELINOR CARUCCI, *FATHER WITH WHITE UNDERWEAR*, 1998. SOURCES FOR DATA: *HUMAN REPRODUCTION*; *THE BMJ*.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ELINOR CARRUCI

Why Do My Kids Think My Taste Is Lame?

BY CARVELL WALLACE

A LITTLE REQUEST TO MY fellow dads and dad-type figures: Please stop trying to foist your pop-cultural tastes on your children. Earlier this year, a Twitter kerfuffle arose, minor by the standards of social-media mudslinging but which illustrates the point: Footage of Steve Martin's 1978 King Tut skit resurfaced, and Gen Zers responded with a collective "… okay?" That led hordes of mostly middle-aged men to scold and weep and whine about how sad it is that the youth have forsaken the true genius that is Steve Martin.

Is it, though? Is it sad? Why should we care if some nineteen-year-old thinks Steve Martin is lame? With all due respect, is Steve Martin going to starve because of it? No, in part because he's worth $140 million. Will humanity crumble? We managed to chug along for roughly three hundred thousand years before the *Let's Get Small* record dropped; if we crumble now, it won't be because TikTokers didn't dig the King Tut bit.

I suspect the dads and dad-type figures got mad because if the youth don't value Steve Martin, maybe they don't value us. We all define ourselves by what we like and what we don't, and we're too easily threatened by anyone who doesn't see the world as we see it.

What's so great about you and your tastes, Gramps? Or about me and mine? I'm forty-seven and the father to a nineteen-year-old and a sixteen-year-old, which means I've endured adolescence three times over: once in the nineties and twice in the 2010s. What I've learned is that we Gen Xers are no better, or worse, than our kids, and what we like and what we've created is no more, or no less, meaningful. And this: My job as a father is to find out what kind of world my children want to live in and to see if I can stop my whining long enough to help them manifest it.

Imagine you were a Gen Zer born in, say, 2003. Would you listen to literally anything you were told by the generations that brought global warming, the surveillance state, trillions of dollars in debt, and fucking Carrot Top?! Hell no.

But maybe you'd like this George Carlin clip right here…

Carvell Wallace is a writer and podcaster based in Oakland.

GETTY IMAGES. SOURCE FOR DATA: MORNING CONSULT.

IS IT EVEN MORAL TO HAVE A KID IN TODAY'S UNHINGED WORLD?

BY MARK O'CONNELL

ONE OF MY EARLIEST memories of parenthood is of sitting in a chair in the maternity ward reading a newspaper as my wife and newborn son slept beside me. As I turned the pages, an immense panorama of horror and futility unfolded before my eyes: wars, famines, the ongoing dissolution of political orders, increasingly depraved levels of income inequality—and towering implacably above it all, the rising tide of imminent climate catastrophe. *What have we done,* I asked myself, *bringing such a tiny, vulnerable, precious creature into such a terrible world?*

I won't claim that, in the nine years since that day, I've been in a state of constant existential despair. Most of the worrying I do about my son and his four-year-old sister tends toward the banal and quotidian. (Is she eating too much sugar? Is he getting too much screen time?) But every so often, I am forced to think about the deeper future—of the planet and of our species—and I feel once again that vertiginous fear of what lies ahead for my children.

1 in 4 *people without kids say climate change is a reason they don't have them.*

In late March, just after my son's birthday, I read that the Conger ice shelf, an area of east Antarctica almost as large as Los Angeles, had collapsed into the ocean. A week or so later, the United Nations secretary-general, in his message accompanying a new climate report, warned of "cascading and irreversible climate impacts" that put us "firmly on a track towards an unlivable world." This is now an irreducible element of being a parent: the hope that civilization itself will outlive your children.

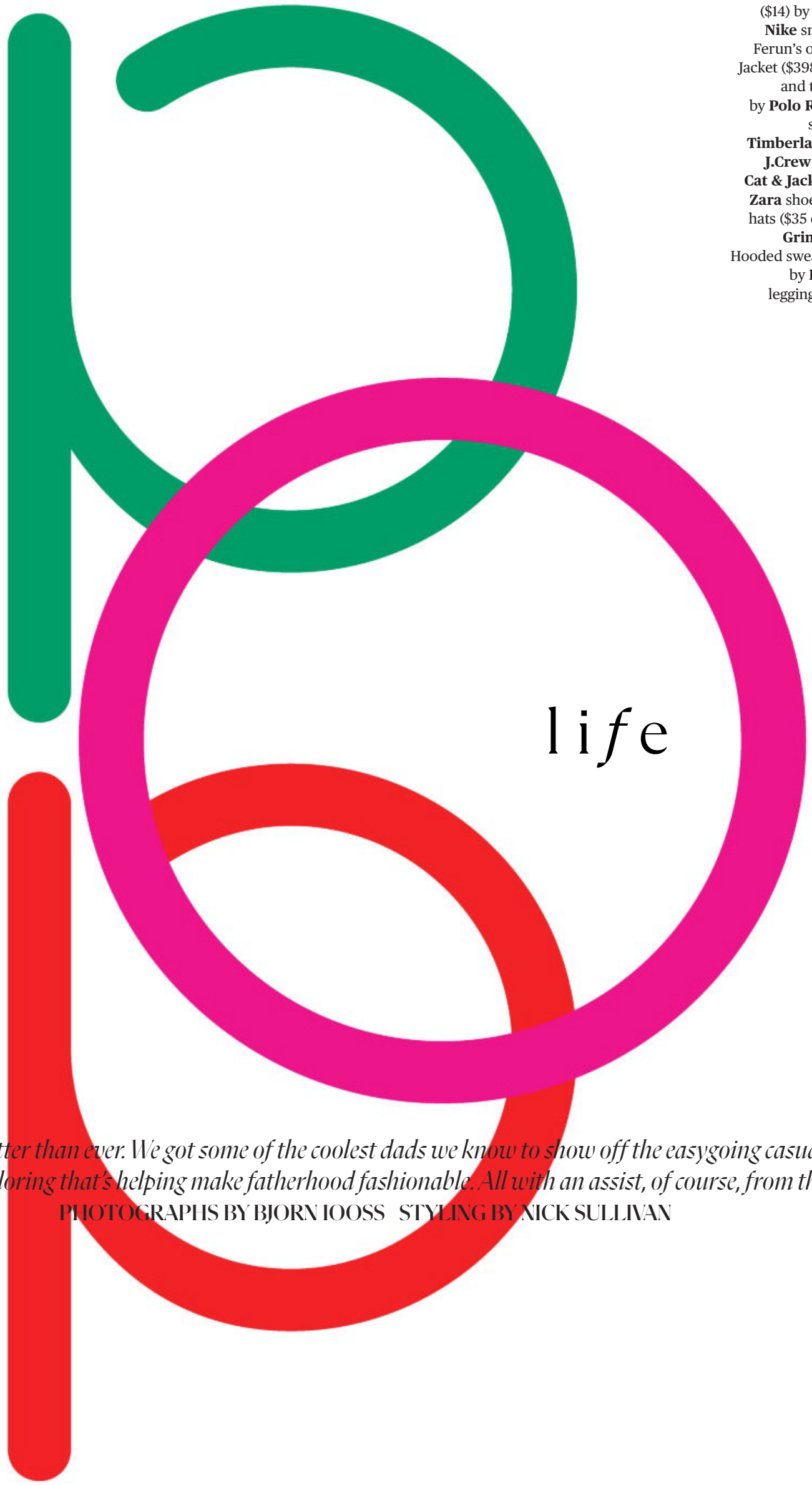
What have we done? What is at stake, morally, in the decision to have a child at this painfully fraught and uncertain moment in history? It could be argued that to do so is to make the child a hostage to fortune. Worse, it could be seen as an entirely selfish refusal to think about the long-term consequences, both personal and collective, of an essentially shortsighted act.

There are times when I myself see it that way. But then I remember that humans have always brought children into an uncertain landscape. I'd be happier to take my chances with 2022 than with, say, anytime before the discovery of penicillin. To exist at all is to be at the mercy of the world.

There is, obviously, no shortage of excellent reasons not to have children; the possibility of their inheriting "an unlivable world" is certainly among them. But a preemptive capitulation to despair feels intolerable, at least to me. The act of bringing a child into the world is always a gesture of hope—as much for the world as for the child. And hope, by definition, is uncertain. It also may be misguided, but I would not want to live without hope, any more than I would want to live without my children.

What have we done? That remains to be seen.

Mark O'Connell is the author of, most recently, Notes from an Apocalypse.



life

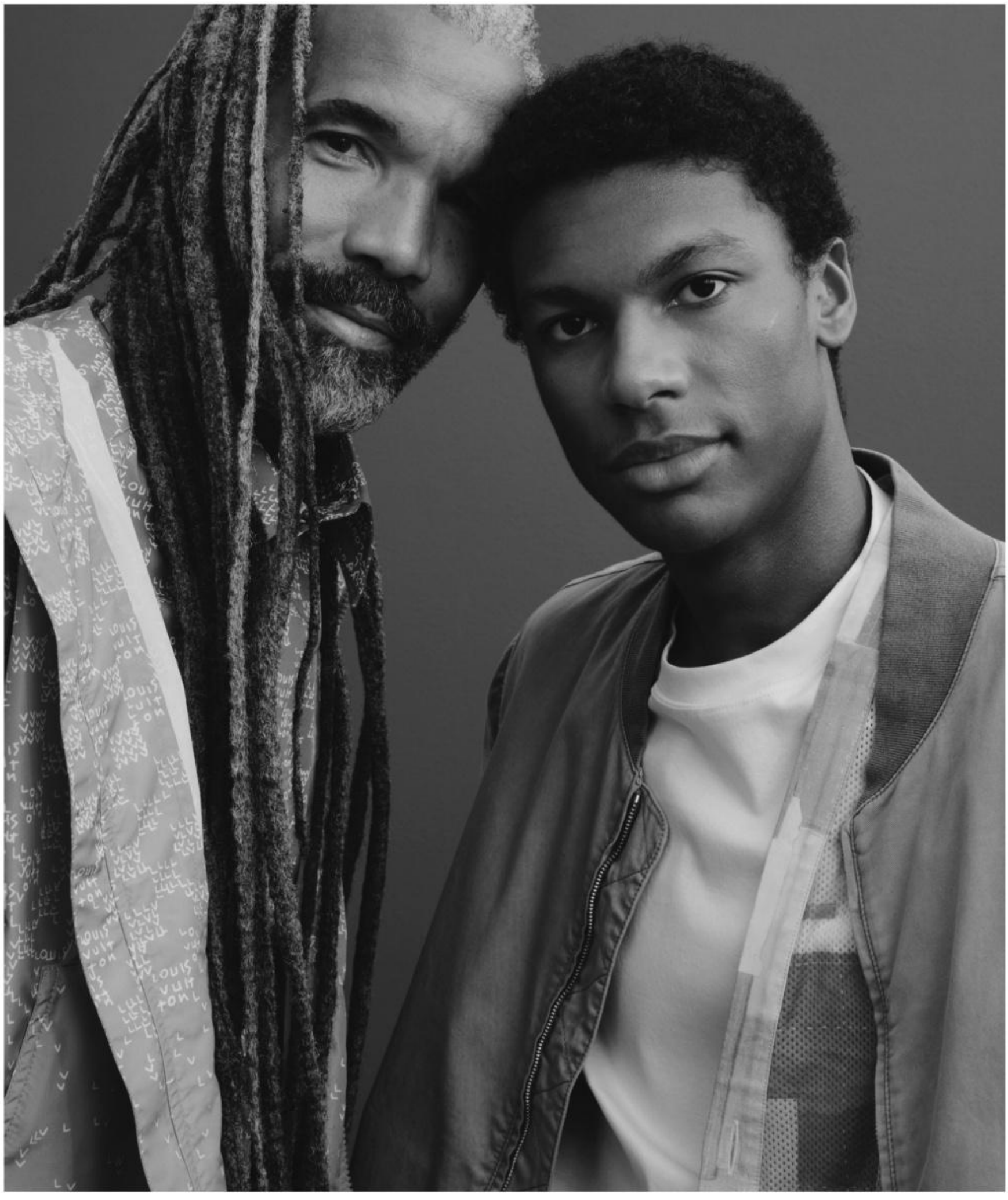
ON FERUN: Sweater ($530) by **Isabel Marant;** shorts ($1,655) by **the Elder Statesman;** socks ($14) by **Arvin Goods; Nike** sneakers ($100), Ferun's own. ON RALF: Jacket ($398), shirt ($199), and trousers ($248) by **Polo Ralph Lauren;** shoes ($150) by **Timberland.** ON BARK: **J.Crew** sweater ($98), **Cat & Jack** trousers, and **Zara** shoes, Bark's own; hats ($35 each) by **Peter Grimm.** ON MIEX: Hooded sweatshirt ($1,295) by **Harden; H&M** leggings, Miex's own.

Dad style is better than ever. We got some of the coolest dads we know to show off the easygoing casual gear and effortless tailoring that's helping make fatherhood fashionable. All with an assist, of course, from their kids.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BJORN IOOSS STYLING BY NICK SULLIVAN

Ralf Mayer (51), architect and owner of MDIM Architecture, and Ferun (14), Bark (7), and Miex (11) Mayer Brudermann_
What have you learned from your kids? "They bring things to your attention that you would usually brush off because you're used to them. It's kind of like you get a second view that you wouldn't have revisited if it wasn't for them, a different perspective on things that we're not sensitive to anymore. Basically, you relive childhood to a certain extent, which is very interesting." —Ralf _ *Interviews throughout by Lauren Kranc*

Daryl S. Dismond (60), maître d' and model, and Silas J. Dismond (17), below_
Do you have a piece of clothing you're saving to pass down? "When I moved to New York, there was Studio 54, Area, and then Nell's. So when I started working there, we thought we were really cool. We had these jackets that had NELL'S on the back. I saved this jacket. I was like, 'No, I'm not throwing this out. Even though I'm not wearing it, I know that [Silas] might want it.' And he wears the Nell's jacket all the time." —Daryl



Marc Hungerbühler (58), artist and curator, and Sebastiao Hungerbühler (24), creative director and model, opposite_
What's the most embarrassing thing your dad has ever done? "When we do or say the same thing and other people pick up on it. My really close friend that I grew up with calls it a Marc-ism. Or my girlfriend will be like, 'Oh my God, that was Marc.' Maybe I've adopted the way that he thinks. When we have long conversations, our brains almost merge in a way. I'm not ashamed to do the same thing as him. It's just when people notice—that's the more embarrassing part." —Sebastiao

THIS PAGE, ON SEBASTIAO: Suit ($2,845) and tank ($265) by **Dolce & Gabbana;** loafers ($1,125) by **Hermès;** socks ($21) by **the London Sock Company.** ON MARC: Coat, Marc's own; shirt ($795) and jeans ($1,125) by **Dolce & Gabbana;** shoes ($169) by **Moral Code.** OPPOSITE, ON DARYL: Jacket ($3,200) and shirt ($1,040) by **Louis Vuitton Men's.** ON SILAS: Jacket ($3,295) and T-shirt ($295) by **Brunello Cucinelli;** cardigan ($375) by **Kuon.**

Jeffrey Schad (44), director of photography at Vineyard Vines and co-owner of Laurel & Ash Farm, and Alexis Zadoc Ruprecht-Schad (2.5)_

Is there a ritual you two have together? "I get him up every morning. He always has to have a glass of milk, in a specific glass. Once in a while, I'll hide these little cookies in my pocket when I get him. And he always knows and tries to find them in my pocket. It's almost like a dog sniffing for a treat. But it's super sweet. I look forward to the routine. Unless, you know, he's crazy all night."

OPPOSITE, ON JEFFREY: Jacket ($3,200), polo ($1,600), and jeans ($1,450) by **Dior Men; Heritage Boot Co.** boots, Jeffrey's own. ON ALEXIS: **Carhartt** overalls ($30), **Giggle** sweater ($65), **Vans** sneakers ($55), and bib, Alexis's own. THIS PAGE, ON MILO: Jacket, shirt, and shorts by **Prada;** shoes ($998) by **Marsèll;** socks ($80) by **Falke.** ON STEPHAN: Jacket ($5,595) and shirt ($2,350) by **Loro Piana;** jeans ($90) by **Levi's.**

Stephan Moskovic (50), founder of Models.com, and Milo Moskovic (14)_

What has Milo taught you? "When Milo was about seven years old, they asked me, 'What is the most important thing to you in life?' And I was reflecting on that, so I asked them, 'Well, what do you think is the most important thing in life?' And they said, 'Family. My family.' And it really made me put things in perspective as to why we matter so much to each other." —Stephan

THIS PAGE, ON DOMINIQUE: Jacket ($3,200) and trousers ($1,300) by **Gucci;** shoes ($548) by **John Elliott.** ON JAYDEN: Shirt ($1,150), trousers ($1,100), and hat ($415) by **Gucci;** tank ($43 for pack of three) by **Calvin Klein;** sneakers ($80) by **Converse;** socks ($40) by **Paul Smith.** OPPOSITE, ON RYUHEI: Jacket ($995), shirt ($360), and trousers ($625) by **Overcoat.** ON HARUTAKA: Shirt by **Overcoat.**

Dominique Hollington (33), model, and Jayden Rainford (13)_

What do you admire about your dad? "His passion. Watching your father do something as big as Paris Fashion Week is such an inspiration and gives me a drive to succeed in life. This was our first photo shoot together. As soon as he walked into the studio, he was like, 'Oh, my baby boy, Jayden,' recording me. It was so embarrassing. It was horrible." —Jayden

Ryuhei Oomaru (44), creative director of Overcoat, and Harutaka Oomaru (2)_

What's a special moment you've had with your son? "On May 5, there's a holiday in Japan called Children's Day to celebrate the kids. It's been around for centuries, and they display these warrior helmets called *kabuto.* Last year, it was Haru's first Children's Day, so I made a makeshift one for us out of cardboard diaper boxes. That was really special." —Ryuhei

THIS PAGE, ON XIODEL: Jacket ($2,695), trousers ($1,995), and sneakers ($890) by **Zegna.** ON RUISDAEL: Parka ($4,000), jacket ($4,250), and trousers ($760) by **Hermès;** tank ($88) by **John Elliott;** sneakers ($70) by **Vans.** OPPOSITE, ON JAMIE: Jacket ($2,695) by **Giorgio Armani;** T-shirt ($70 for pack of two) by **Emporio Armani.** ON GREY: Jacket ($1,740) by **Bode;** sweater ($675) by **Connor McKnight;** beanie ($30) by **Stadium Goods.**

CASTING BY **BARBARA PFISTER.** HAIR BY **CLAY NIELSEN** USING LEONOR GREYL. GROOMING BY **SANDRINE VAN SLEE** USING KÉRASTASE AT ART DEPARTMENT.

Ruisdael Cintron (37), model and actor, and Xiodel Ruis Cintron (18)_

Tell me about a memorable day you've spent together. "I had custody of Xiodel when he was three years old, so we have a very close relationship. When Xiodel turned twelve, I took him to his first protest in Washington, D.C. I had like twenty dollars in my bank account, but I had just enough to get bus tickets and go. We were protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline. We got there at like six in the morning, because I wanted to see the Native Americans do a water ritual by the Washington Monument. I don't know if I was doing the right thing or the wrong thing, exposing him to so much, because he was so young. They kicked us off the Capitol steps just for burning sage. But the whole experience was beautiful. It engraved a connection between us and an experience for him to remember." —Ruisdael

FOR STORE INFORMATION SEE PAGE 114.

Jamie Shugrue (44), fine-wine sales specialist, and Grey Shugrue (11)_

What surprised you about becoming a dad? "There are just these certain moments where it kind of takes you by surprise, where it's almost like: This is what a father is. When he's having a hard time with something, an emotion comes over me where I feel like I have to protect him from the way he's feeling at that moment. If it's emotional, if he's in pain, it's just this thing that kicks in when you're a father." —Jamie

What I've Learned

Fatherhood

ESQUIRE MAGAZINE, 89, NEW YORK

Wisdom and advice from and about DAD that has appeared in these pages.

_**FATHERHOOD?** I love it. It introduced an element of fear into my life. When you're a bachelor, you don't give a shit. You can do anything. But when you become a father, you get scared about everything. –Alex Trebek, April 2003

_**AFTER ALL THESE YEARS,** our father has never understood that we, his children, tend to gravitate toward the very people he's spent his life warning us about. –David Sedaris, June 1998

_**I WOULD ENVISION DIFFERENT** scenarios in which I would become violent reacting to people's reactions to my children–especially to my severely handicapped child. Eventually, he taught me that was not necessary. Just by himself. By being a gift to us. He showed us how to have faith and belief and inner strength and to never give up. –Neil Young, January 2006

_**MY MOTHER USED TO SAY TO ME** when I was a kid: "I'd throw myself in front of a truck for you." Over and over again. I didn't know what the hell she was talking about. "What do you mean, you want to throw . . . you'll die." I say that to my kids now. –Gene Simmons, July 2002

_**CHILDREN LEARN FROM WHAT YOU ARE** rather than what you tell them. What you try to jam into their heads isn't going to be worth beans if the way you're living your life doesn't look like that. –Alan Arkin, January 2007

_**MY DADDY SAID,** "When the sun comes up, boy, you get up. When the sun go down, dammit, you go down." –Al Green, November 2001

_**MY DAD DIDN'T PASS DOWN** any soufflé recipes. For him, it was all about the sandwich, and he taught me to pay attention to every part. That meant meats and cheeses sliced to order from the deli and using bakery bread, light but sturdy, so it won't get soggy when it comes in contact with the filling. You want to slice the bread yourself so that you can balance the ratio of the filling to your bread–let's say 30 percent filling to 35 percent bread on either side. The last consideration is the most important: You must offset the richness of the meat with some acidity, whether pickles [or] slaw. Because whether it's made by the dad or the son, a good sandwich is about relationships. –Michael Symon, June/July 2012

_**CHILDREN TEACH YOU** that you can still be humbled by life, that you learn something new all the time. That's the secret to life, really . . . I'm still working because I learn something new all the time. It's the secret to relationships–never think you've got it all. –Clint Eastwood, January 2009

_**REGARDLESS OF WHETHER** I might prefer another woman to my wife, I recoil from the possibility of harming my children, putting a blight on their budding young lives, robbing them of what I promised by inference in bringing them into the world. When I think of that, when I look upon my fine intelligent son, my adorable lovely small daughter, the mere thought of a broken home fills me with horror. The emotion of joy which my children arouse in me is mighty as the overture to *Tannhäuser*, a crescendo of glorious music beside which the pleasures of infidelity are no more than the quaverings of a tubercular saxophone, trivial and without power. –Anonymous, June 1939

_**HE USED TO SAY** that I must wish I had a father who didn't drink so much, and I'd always say no, that I knew a lot of fathers, and some of them didn't drink as much as he did, but that despite this he was far and away the best father I'd seen. –Ben Cheever, November 1988

_**IT IS OUR NIGHTMARE,** of wanting desperately to protect our children, not least of all from ourselves. The American father lives inside the discrepancy between what he hopes for his children and what he does to them. –John Leonard, December 1975

_**MY FATHER WOULD SAY,** "Do the best you can. And then the hell with it." He always looked at the effort grade rather than the final grade. –Ted Kennedy, January 2003

_**WHAT DO I DO WELL AS A FATHER?** I'm there all the time. I give unconditional love. And I have a lot of skills in terms of getting them to express themselves. I'm good with handy hints–if they can tell me what their problem is–'cause I've had a lot of problems in life myself. I make an effort to expose them to things. I want them to have a deep, inner feeling that it's all right to be happy, that you don't have to be constantly manufacturing problems that you don't really have. –Jack Nicholson, January 2004

_**I SAW MY FATHER** three times in the next ten years. And what times those were . . . Running to meet him in the hotel hallway, doors flashing past, into his arms and he smelled of cigarette smoke. Later during numerous of my identity crises I would blow smoke through my clothing to recapture those moments. –William S. Burroughs Jr., September 1971

_**MY FATHER WAS A LESSON.** He had his own bakery, and it was closed one day a week, but he would go anyway. He did it because he really loved his bakery. It wasn't a job. –Christopher Walken, June 2009

_**TONIGHT, CECELIA AND I** will sleep together in the narrow hospital bed, the baby on my chest: seven pounds, seven ounces, the weight of my entire world. –Daniel Voll, June 1999

_**ONE RULE OF PARENTING?** Forgive everything. –Michael Caine, December 2014

PROP STYLING: MIAKO KATOH

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFFREY WESTBROOK

WORLD'S
GREATEST
DAD

two fathers

Banners at a memorial in Humboldt, Saskatchewan, commemorating members of the 2017–18 Broncos, with crosses marking those who died in the bus accident on April 6, 2018.

Their sons were among the sixteen people who were killed in a BUS ACCIDENT on a cold afternoon in Saskatchewan. CHRIS JOSEPH and SCOTT THOMAS lost their sons in the same way, but in grief, their roads DIVERGED.

By Mitch Moxley

April 2018

On an arrow-straight stretch of prairie highway, a bus carrying the Humboldt Broncos junior hockey team traveled northbound toward the town of Nipawin, Saskatchewan, home of the rival Hawks. It was a gorgeous late afternoon, bright and clear.

The Broncos were the pride of Humboldt, a farm town of about fifty-nine hundred in central Saskatchewan, where players from out of town live with local families and hockey is like a religion. The team was heading to an elimination playoff game, but the mood on the bus was upbeat: Players, some as young as sixteen, joked around, listened to music, and believed, against the odds, that they could still win the series. They had dyed their hair mustard yellow in playoff solidarity, and somebody had sneaked a half bottle of rum onto the bus in case of celebration.

The Broncos were the most successful team in the history of the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League (SJHL) yet had been on a bit of a losing streak in recent years. That season was a turnaround year, however, thanks in part to the team's coach, Darcy Haugan, a forty-two-year-old husband and father from Peace River, Alberta, who believed in recruiting players of good character. When a snowstorm hit town, Haugan would cancel practice and send his guys out with shovels to help the community dig out. He was a fan of one-liners and dad jokes and said things like "It's a great day to be a Bronco, gentlemen."

The team went 33–19–3–3 that season, under the leadership of veteran center Logan Schatz, the twenty-year-old captain; Conner Lukan, twenty-one, a force in the locker room; and eighteen-year-old goalie Jacob Wassermann, an SJHL rookie of the year. The Broncos were an exceptionally close group that year. They'd often watch episodes of *The Bachelor* together and gather before games in the office of trainer Dayna Brons, a much-loved twenty-four-year-old who grew up just outside Humboldt and traveled on the team bus. The players weren't paid; a couple might go on to play pro somewhere, but most were hoping for a university scholarship, or for a few more years of competitive hockey before getting on with their futures, which must have seemed boundless.

On April 4, 2018, two nights before the game, the Broncos had lost in triple overtime to the Hawks. The crowd stayed for nearly a full extra game of hockey. During a power play in the third overtime, the Hawks slipped the puck past Wassermann. It was a crushing defeat.

Now the Broncos were down 3–1 in the best-of-seven semifinal playoff series. As the bus approached the intersection of highways 35 and 335, some of the guys had started changing into their shirts and ties to prepare for the game.

At the same time, a semitruck loaded with peat moss and pulling a pup trailer traveled westbound. The driver, Jaskirat Singh Sidhu, twenty-nine at the time, was a newly married permanent resident from India who lived in Calgary, Alberta. He was a novice commercial driver, with only a few weeks of road training. He was sober and undistracted by his cell phone. His view was unobstructed. He became concerned about a loose tarp on the trailer, diverting his gaze as he passed five warnings, including a flashing stop signal, about the only controlled intersection for miles in any direction.

At approximately 4:53 P.M., the Broncos' bus driver, fifty-nine-year-old Glen Doerksen, noticed the truck speeding toward the intersection. "Whoa!" he screamed. Some of the guys stood to see what was happening. Doerksen slammed on the brakes, and the bus skidded almost eighty feet into the intersection at between sixty and sixty-six miles per hour, T-boning Sidhu's trailer.

The truck flipped, and the bus was ripped in three pieces, its front obliterated and everything above floor level sheared off. Passengers were thrown across the asphalt and into a frozen ditch. Fourteen people died at the scene, including Doerksen, Haugan, and Schatz. In the frenzied aftermath, the survivors, some so disfigured they were unrecognizable, were rushed to nearby hospitals. Brons and another victim died within the week. In an instant, dozens of lives on the bus and beyond were ripped apart in one of the worst sporting disasters in North America in nearly fifty years. For those involved, on the bus and off, the tragedy was only beginning.

SCOTT THOMAS IS A CLASSIC CANADIAN HOCKEY DAD. BROADLY BUILT, with a cherubic face, light-brown eyes, and stubble, he played in the Western Hockey League when he was young and, after becoming a chiropractor and settling in his hometown of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, became a devoted youth coach. He coached his son, Evan, at almost every level before Evan moved to Humboldt to join the Broncos at age eighteen.

Evan, with a bright smile and a birthmark on his right cheek, was a gifted athlete, and he loved being a teammate. He thought he might become a surgeon after his hockey career ended—he sometimes watched *Grey's Anatomy* with his mom, Laurie, to soak in the surgery scenes.

On the afternoon of game 5 against the Hawks, Thomas set off from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan's largest city, to Nipawin to watch what could be the last game of the season.

In the car with another dad, Cal Hobbs, Thomas texted Evan.

Hey bud, just leaving, see you after the game.

No problem Dad.

Good luck.

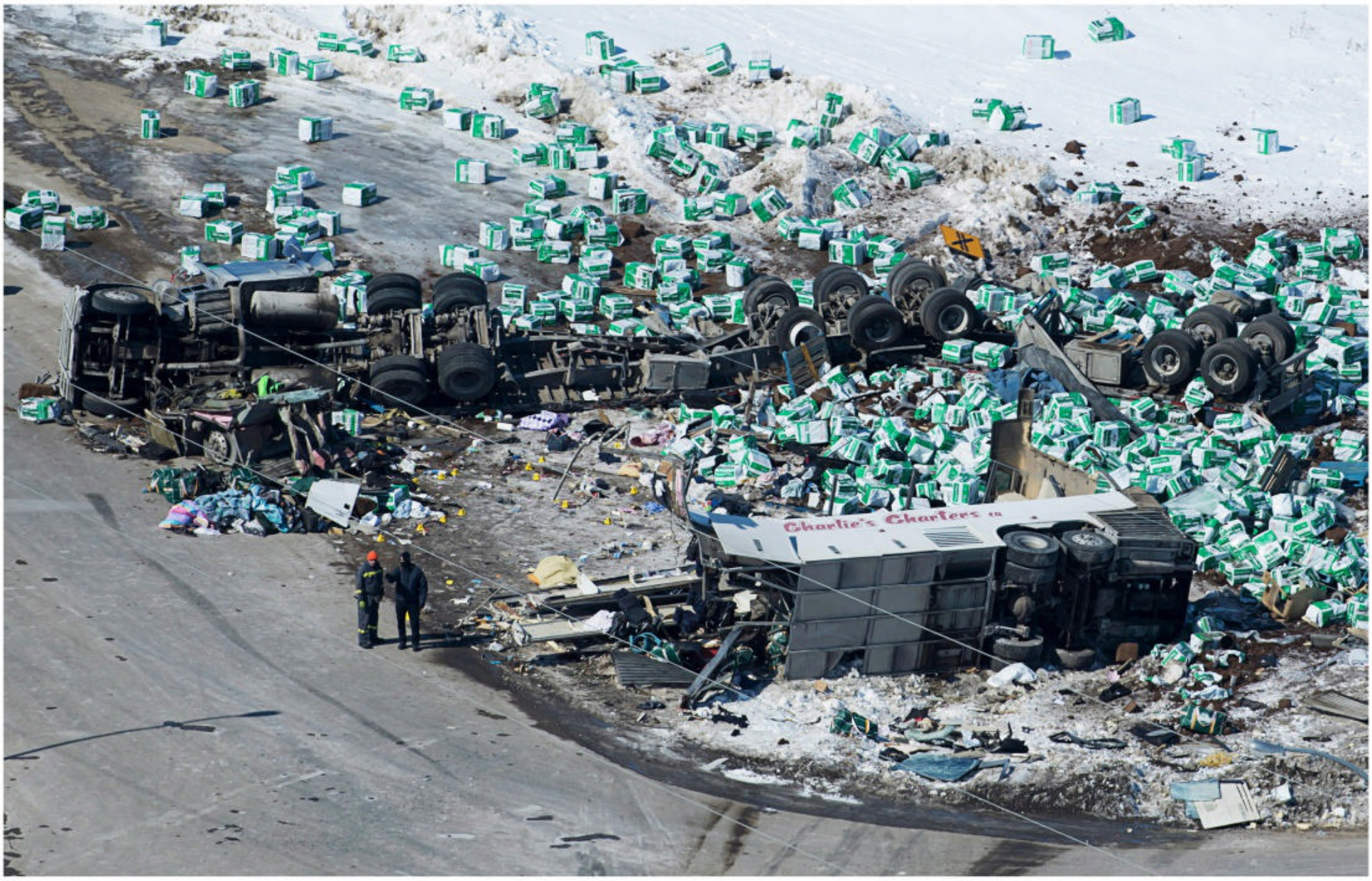
When they were about an hour and a half east of Saskatoon, Hobbs's Bluetooth rang. It was his son, Declan, a player for the Hawks.

"Why the hell is Declan calling at this time?" Hobbs said to Thomas. "He should be at the rink."

Declan said there'd been an accident involving the Broncos' bus. "It's bad," he said, after a pause. "It's really bad."

Hobbs and Thomas turned north. A helicopter buzzed overhead, and ambulances passed them on the highway. Thomas called and texted his son, but there was no response.

Chris Beaudry, an assistant coach for the Broncos, was driving on his own, about twenty minutes behind the bus. When he reached the town of Tisdale, forty minutes from Nipawin, the Hawks' assistant called. He said he heard there had been an accident. Could Beaudry try to find out more? He figured it must be a flat tire and that the game might be delayed for forty-five minutes or so.



A semitruck slammed into the Broncos' bus, shearing everything off above floor level.

JONATHAN HAYWARD/THE CANADIAN PRESS (PREVIOUS SPREAD: RINK; THIS PAGE: CRASH SITE)

But as he approached the scene, he could see it was much worse. The bus was in pieces, and the truck was on its side. He could make out bodies on the highway and in the ditch, bodies in the seats.

Somebody from a nearby farm had brought stacks of blankets, and volunteers covered the passengers with them. When first responders arrived, they rushed from person to person, climbing over the remains of the bus looking for signs of life. The scene, illuminated by red and blue flashing lights, was eerily quiet as paramedics did their hectic work.

Many passengers were obviously deceased, some pinned in the wreckage. Others, it was difficult to tell because of the severity of facial trauma. Some were conscious, covered in blood but moving. The Broncos' Ryan Straschnitzki, nineteen, was thrown outside the bus, all the way to where the truck had overturned. He couldn't feel his legs and drifted in and out of consciousness, asking a nurse at the scene, "Are my friends all dead?" The injured were placed in ambulances and rushed to hospitals in Nipawin and Tisdale. Other cases were transported to Saskatoon by helicopter.

Sidhu, the truck driver, who had escaped death by a fraction of a second, crawled out of his overturned semi unharmed. He stayed at the scene and cooperated with police. Thomas and Hobbs arrived at the intersection of 35 and 335 about an hour after the crash, but the police wouldn't let anybody through. The fathers of players Xavier Labelle and Brayden Camrud were there, pacing back and forth in the quiet cold, waiting for information.

CHRIS JOSEPH WAS FRANTICALLY TRYING TO GET ANY NEWS HE COULD about his son, Jaxon, a twenty-year-old forward with the Broncos, as he rode with his family from their hometown of St. Albert, Alberta, to Saskatoon. Joseph, an NHL journeyman turned firefighter, is normally a calm figure. But that night, he was anything but. This was about his son—the same little boy he had coached from his very first team, the Eppelheim Polar Bears, in Germany, where Joseph had played after the NHL.

It was Jaxon's first year with the team. He was a classic middle-brother type who loved joking around with teammates and fostering harmony, much as he did with his own family.

Jaxon's parents had seen him just two days before, in Humboldt, where they'd traveled to watch the game 4 overtime loss. The family met at a pizza place afterward, and Jaxon was distracted. He hadn't played well and was worried he might not play at all in game 5. Plus, he was with a new girlfriend, Quinn, who was meeting his mom for the first time. Jaxon had recently told Quinn he loved her.

The next morning, the Josephs met their son for a quick coffee; they weren't planning to go to Nipawin for the game. "Good luck" was the last thing Chris Joseph said to Jaxon before setting off back home to Alberta.

Now, in the car speeding toward Saskatoon, Joseph was calling anyone he could think of who might have information about the crash. All he was getting was bad news, but nothing about Jaxon. *Positive thoughts*, he told himself. *Just put out positive thoughts.* Eventually, he heard Jaxon might have been airlifted to a Saskatoon hospital. He experienced a fleeting sense of relief. *Okay, he's alive,* he thought. *He's in bad shape, but he's alive.*

IN NIPAWIN, SCOTT THOMAS AND FELLOW Broncos family members, waiting for news about the fate of their loved ones, were directed to a local church, where police and some of the Hawks were gathered in the pews. After about two hours, Broncos families were taken into a room in the back of the church with several Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officers. One of the officers said, "There's no script for this, but we've had a very severe

“Year one was a blur. Year two, we thought it would be better—it wasn’t. I GET KICKED BETWEEN THE EYES WITH GRIEF.” —Chris Joseph

accident. We’ve got fourteen casualties at the scene.”

He read a list of names of those who police knew had been taken to the hospital either by ambulance or by helicopter. “If we didn’t read your son’s name,” the officer said, “that means they’re still at the scene.”

“What the hell does that mean?” asked Paul Labelle, the father of Xavier, an eighteen-year-old defenseman from Saskatoon.

“That means they’re gone,” Thomas said.

CHRIS JOSEPH AND HIS FAMILY DROVE THROUGH the night to Saskatoon. They arrived at the Royal University Hospital after midnight on April 7 and were shown into a room with a Humboldt player who was badly injured, wrapped in bandages and unrecognizable but alive. Was this Jaxon? Joseph couldn’t tell. He looked in his mouth for evidence of a retainer. He lifted the blanket to look at his naked body, searching, agonizingly, for any indication that the young man lying in the hospital bed was his son. *I don’t know.*

The next day at noon, after a sleepless night in a nearby hotel, Joseph and his family received a call from the coroner’s office. Come to the funeral home, they said. Jaxon was there.

When Joseph walked into the viewing room, he knew in an instant that he was looking at Jaxon. He felt a flash of embarrassment that he’d ever thought the player in the hospital last night might have been his son. *This boy I’m looking at now, this is my boy.*

THE WEEK AFTER THE CRASH BROUGHT THE TWENTY-nine Broncos families one agony after another. In the hospital in Saskatoon, the parents of goalie Parker Tobin, eighteen, remained at his bedside, waiting for their son to wake. He had a fractured skull, more than twenty broken bones, and a gash that ran down his forehead and across his face. He’d had surgery to put screws in his spine, he couldn’t speak, and he was heavily sedated.

All the while, the family of Xavier Labelle had been told their son had died. They’d even gone to a makeshift morgue to identify bodies. But when the player back in the hospital woke up, he spoke French—a language Parker Tobin didn’t know. It wasn’t Parker after all; it was Xavier. Because of their similar builds, bleached-blond hair, and physical trauma, the two young men had been mixed up. Parker’s family had been holding vigil at the bedside of another family’s son.

In the midst of everything, the Humboldt bus crash had become an international news story. Queen Elizabeth and President Trump offered their condolences, NHL games featured moments of silence, the rapper Drake wore a Broncos jersey to a Toronto Raptors game, and a GoFundMe campaign would go on to raise almost $12 million to assist the victims’ families.

On April 8, a vigil was held at Elgar Petersen Arena in Humboldt. The players’ cars were still in the parking lot, adorned with flowers. The RCMP, meanwhile, was piecing together what had happened the day of the crash.

Jaskirat Singh Sidhu’s eighty-three-foot truck was loaded with nine hundred bales of peat moss; the total weight of the vehicle and its load was more than one hundred thousand pounds. He told police that the tarp had come loose earlier in the day and that he didn’t realize an intersection was coming up. He’d made no attempt to brake.

Doerksen, the Broncos’ driver, had the right of way and did not slow down as he approached the intersection. His view was obstructed by a copse of trees on a farm at the southeast corner, and by the time he saw Sidhu’s truck barreling toward the intersection, there wasn’t enough time to swerve or stop.

It wasn’t the first time the intersection had seen tragedy. In 1997, six family members were killed at the same spot. The blinking warning light Sidhu had missed was added in the aftermath, but other recommendations, such as rumble strips to alert drivers of a coming stop, were not.

Though Sidhu was physically unharmed in the crash, it brought the stable life he was building for himself in Canada to an end. He had grown up in rural India and completed a commerce degree before following his girlfriend, Tanvir Mann, to Canada in 2014. He earned a diploma in Calgary and worked part-time at a liquor store. He then obtained his

Top inset, second from left: Driver Glen Doerksen; middle row, fourth from right: Jaxon Joseph; middle row, second from right: Evan Thomas; front row, center: Coach Darcy Haugan. Parker Tobin (front row, far left) and Xavier Labelle (middle row, fifth from left) were mistaken for each other after the accident.

COURTESY HUMBOLDT BRONCOS

Year three was better. But every once in a while,

Left: Chris Joseph holding his wife Andrea's hand. Right: Scott Thomas, Evan's father.

trucking license in 2017 but didn't begin driving commercially until the next year. That February, he and Mann were married in India. They returned to Canada in March, a month before the accident.

In nine out of ten Canadian provinces at the time of the crash, comprehensive truck-driver training was not mandatory—across the country, more strenuous training was required for a hairdresser than for an inexperienced driver getting behind the wheel of one of the most dangerous vehicles on the road.

Sidhu was employed by a Calgary-based trucking company, and he had spent just one week training, two weeks on the road with another driver, and one week by himself. As he acknowledged in court, he was in way over his head. Although he had a clean driving record and no criminal record, Canadian outlets reported at the time that he had violated fifty-one federal and nineteen provincial regulations between March 26 and April 6.

July 2018

THREE MONTHS AFTER THE CRASH THAT CLAIMED THE LIFE OF HIS SON, EVAN, Scott Thomas was at a golf tournament when a reporter called. He asked if Thomas knew that police had charged Sidhu with twenty-nine counts of dangerous driving causing injury and death. It was the first time Thomas had heard the name of the man responsible for Evan's death.

Thomas wasn't certain how he should feel about Sidhu. His grief was overwhelming. So was his anger, and he often ruminated on the circumstances of the crash: *How could you miss that fucking stop sign? It's four feet wide with a blinking red light*.

He would attend Sidhu's hearing. He wanted to see the man who had killed his son. He wanted Sidhu to look him in the eye. But Thomas also wanted to know if he could forgive.

In St. Albert, Chris Joseph's mission in the months after the accident was to find something, anything, that could get him through the day. There had been an endless stream of visitors to his and his wife Andrea's home in the weeks after the crash. Eventually, it became too much, and the Josephs placed a sign out front thanking supporters but also asking them to respect the family's privacy. Joseph needed to take time off work. He told the firehouse he'd be gone for two weeks; he ended up staying out for six months.

Joseph has a broad and sincere smile, and when he talks about Jaxon, he beams. His gaze drifts, as if he's entering a different space, a different time, one where Jaxon is still there. But the smallest thing could send him on a downward spiral. A song—"You Should Be Here," by Cole Swindell, for instance—could trigger a brutal swell of emotion. He agonized over Jaxon's lost potential, not as a hockey player but as a young man.

Joseph had made himself available to the media, and the publicity became a double-edged sword. It meant people knew Jaxon's name and allowed Joseph to talk about his son and his anguish. But it also meant he was constantly living in his loss. He was reminded of the crash all the time—in images of the site, stories of survivors, and, mostly, reports about Sidhu.

As the case against Sidhu progressed, Joseph remained "knee deep in it"—reading government reports, police reports, and news about the investigation. He studied trucking regulations and dissected Sidhu's story for inconsistencies. He saw it as a way to fight for Jaxon, to keep Jaxon's legacy alive, to push for reform in the Canadian trucking industry, and to see the man responsible bear the legal consequences of his actions.

Joseph questioned Sidhu's version of events, and he came to believe that the driver deliberately ran the intersection. "He didn't wake up with the intent to hurt anyone. I do believe that," Joseph says. But "Saskatchewan is quiet. He took a chance. There were five signs—how do you miss five signs?"

Joseph's feelings about Sidhu weren't motivated by malice or hatred, he says. They were motivated by a sense of justice and, more than that, by his unimaginable grief.

Whatever punishment Sidhu faced, Joseph believed, would pale in comparison with the punishment his own family would endure for the rest of their lives: the daily reality that Jaxon was never coming home. For that, Joseph could not forgive now, and he wasn't sure he would ever be able to.

January 2019

ESCORTED BY HIS LAWYERS, SIDHU ARRIVED AT A makeshift courthouse in Melfort, Saskatchewan, wearing a black suit and tie, with cropped black hair, a beard, and dark circles under his eyes. A few weeks earlier, on January 8, 2019, he pleaded guilty to all twenty-nine counts against him. After his sentencing, he accepted responsibility, apologized to the families directly, and wept.

RYAN REMIORZ/THE CANADIAN PRESS (CHRIS AND ANDREA JOSEPH). KAYLE NEIS/THE CANADIAN PRESS (THOMAS).

"I've taken the most valuable things of your life," he told those assembled in the courtroom. "I take full responsibility for what has happened. It happened because of my lack of experience, and I am so, so, so, so, so sorry."

Over the course of the four-day hearing, many of the ninety victim statements were read into the record.

"I have no forgiveness," said Robin Lukan, the mother of Conner Lukan. "No consequences, no sentence, no apology, no admission of guilt will ever be enough to fill the void that has been left." Andrea Joseph, Jaxon's mother, asked Sidhu, "Have you ever kissed a dead body before? I never thought in my life I would be kissing my dead son's eyelids, nose, cheeks, and lips over and over again, as I knew this would be the last time I would ever feel his skin under my lips."

Others reached for forgiveness, or something close to it. Head coach Darcy Haugan's wife, Christina, told Sidhu: "I forgive you. There are days when the unjustness and sadness are definitely still there, but I have been forgiven for things when I didn't deserve it, so I will do the same."

Scott Thomas wrestled with his own statement. Some of the letters he wrote felt like lectures. Some felt meandering. In the end, he drafted a statement not addressed to Sidhu but to Evan, about all the ways his family missed him. "Hi, Son, it's Dad," Thomas read when his turn came. "God, we miss you. We miss you every waking moment of every day. We miss your smile. We miss your laugh. We miss everything about you."

One night, Thomas woke up struggling to breathe. He felt like he was choking and reached for a silver chain dangling from his neck. It carried two pendants: one with Evan's thumbprint, the other with the Broncos' logo on the front and Evan's number—17—engraved on the back.

A friend of a friend had recently texted the Thomases, saying she'd had a vision that Evan wanted his parents to let Sidhu know he forgave him. It was something Scott and Laurie had spoken about. They just couldn't shake the feeling that Evan would want them to forgive. "Maybe we gotta let this guy know there are some people out there who care about him," Thomas said.

The day after Thomas addressed the hearing, he and Laurie finally wrote a letter to Sidhu in their hotel room. Thomas placed it in an unsealed envelope along with the Broncos pendant he wore around his neck. In court, he gave the envelope to Sidhu's attorney.

During a lunch break, one of Sidhu's relatives tapped Thomas on the shoulder. "If you'd like, Jaskirat would love to speak with you."

Thomas looked at his wife and daughter. "Holy shit," he said. "Sure."

He waited in a courthouse anteroom reserved for the defendant and his family. Thomas turned around to see that Sidhu was already down on one knee, sobbing. He took Thomas's hands, and Thomas lifted Sidhu up. The two embraced and cried.

Thomas wiped his tears. "What happened?" he asked the truck driver.

"I don't know, I don't know, I don't know. I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry," Sidhu said over and over.

Thomas gave Sidhu his cell-phone number, and Sidhu touched the pendant Thomas had given him, which he wore around his neck. "I'll keep this for the rest of my life," he said.

ON MARCH 22, 2019, PROVINCIAL-COURT JUDGE INEZ CARDINAL sentenced Sidhu to eight years in prison. It was shorter than the maximum sentence of fourteen years but still the longest in Canadian history for an accident that involved the driver of a heavy truck or semi unit. The judge accepted Sidhu's version of events but still expressed disbelief that the crash could have happened at all.

The prison term wasn't the only punishment Sidhu would face. According to Canadian law, because he was a permanent resident of Canada rather than a citizen and his sentence was longer than six months, Sidhu would likely be deported upon his release. He could challenge his deportation, and in January 2021, his immigration lawyer did just that, submitting a petition with the Canada Border Services Agency for Sidhu to stay in the country after serving his sentence.

Sidhu's attempt to stay deeply divided the Broncos families, and it thrust both Scott Thomas and Chris Joseph back into the spotlight.

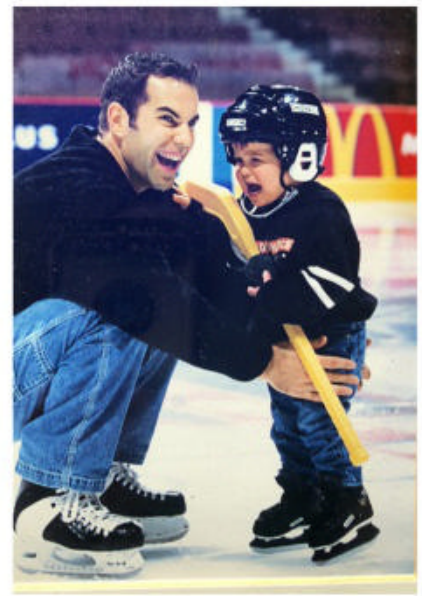
Thomas wasn't the only relative of a crash victim to forgive Sidhu, but he did become the public face of forgiveness, regularly appearing in the media to tell his story. He said he'd spent countless hours turning the case inside out in his mind, and he believed in the end that Sidhu had accepted responsibility for his actions, that he was remorseful and serving his just punishment, and that deporting him from Canada would help nobody.

Plus, Thomas considered that there were other sources of blame for the accident, maybe more deserving of his anger: the trucking company that put Sidhu on the road with such little training, for example, or the government of Saskatchewan for its lax trucking laws and failure to improve the intersection after the first deadly crash, in 1997.

Thomas wrote a letter, as did two other families, supporting Sidhu's attempt to stay in Canada. The letters were included in Sidhu's petition. For Thomas, it wasn't just about Sidhu. Forgiveness was a way to set aside anger, a necessity in order for his family to mourn and heal. Most of all, it was a way to honor Evan.

But the Thomases' position wasn't a popular one among Broncos families. By all accounts, the large majority of them wanted Sidhu deported and were not ready to forgive the man who'd killed their boys. They also felt burned by their portrayal in the Canadian press, which has mostly looked favorably upon Sidhu's attempt to stay in the country. Many of the Broncos families who supported Sidhu's deportation believe they were painted unfairly, as angry and immovable, and that their grief and viewpoints on the case have been downplayed in favor of the redemptive narrative of forgiveness.

In the summer of 2021, a series of stories began appearing in the Canadian media about Sidhu's case. They focused on his fight to remain in Canada and on the theme of forgiveness: "Forgiving Jaskirat Sidhu," "The Humboldt Driver," "Hoping to Stay." Chris and Andrea Joseph appeared in many of these stories, advocating for deportation. They talked of being constantly reminded of Sidhu with follow-up features about his life in Canada, or of running into



Left and center: Chris Joseph's tattoo honoring his son, depicting the two of them when Jaxon was a kid.
Right: Jaxon and his grandfather after a playoff game in Humboldt.

JASON FRANSON/THE CANADIAN PRESS (TATTOO). COURTESY CHRIS JOSEPH (CHRIS AND JAXON JOSEPH, JAXON WITH GRANDFATHER).

Scott and Laurie Thomas (pictured here with Evan, his sister, Jordyn, and the family dog, Lizzy) couldn't shake the feeling that their son would have wanted them to forgive.

him at an intersection in Calgary. They sometimes wonder why he'd even want to stay in Canada at all, where he'll always be known as the driver who killed sixteen people. The way Joseph sees it, the law is the law.

He also wanted Sidhu's deportation to be a deterrent, so that no more parents would have to go through what his family was suffering. He won an award for advocating for stricter laws concerning transportation and safety on buses, but so little had changed since the crash that it could feel as if he were pounding his head against a wall. And what if Sidhu was allowed to stay in Canada? What lessons would be learned from that?

"The thing that would make me happiest—and it wouldn't make me happy—is deportation," Joseph says. "It shouldn't be about how you feel about him.... The law says he should be deported. Just the fact that he's fighting it shows he's not remorseful enough."

The coverage of Sidhu's story also rankled the Josephs, who often felt like minor, dissenting figures in media accounts. During one program, when a long interview Chris had granted was cut to just a few seconds, he was so furious that he screamed at the television set and Andrea cried. He felt "like a footnote in a love story."

SINCE HIS INCARCERATION, SIDHU HAS spent his time reading books and meditating to deal with PTSD and anxiety. He's struggled to sleep, haunted, he has said, by the screams of the survivors on that fateful day.

In March 2022, a month before the fourth anniversary of the crash, the Canada Border Services Agency ruled on Sidhu's case: His first bid to stay in Canada was unsuccessful. One remaining possibility to avoid deportation is a challenge in federal court.

Scott Thomas was disappointed but not surprised by the ruling; he saw it as a missed opportunity to have an honest conversation about Canada's broken trucking industry. Joseph saw the ruling as justice prevailing, and a small relief in the ongoing suffering of the twenty-nine Broncos families.

Sidhu's fate is settled for now, but for Thomas and Joseph, another battle goes on: getting up each morning and putting one foot in front of the other in the wake of immeasurable loss.

Chris and Andrea Joseph have kept Jaxon's room exactly as he left it. Joseph, who has a tattoo honoring his son, is acutely aware that marriages often fall apart after tragedy, and it's something he and Andrea regularly work on. Sometimes they have blowups, and they have to remind each other that they need to be kind to one another, to support each other.

Their daughter was in a car crash recently and broke both wrists. She was okay in the end, but the trauma ushered back the horror of losing Jaxon. Joseph cried for two days. The grief doesn't go away, he says; it only gets slightly more manageable. "Year one was a blur. Year two, we thought it would be a little better—it wasn't. Year three was better—we did a lot of counseling. But every once in a while, I get kicked between the eyes with grief."

Five families, including the Josephs, have filed a civil suit against Sidhu, the trucking company that employed him, the bus manufacturer, and the government of Saskatchewan. "If the money makes it right, then you have to," Joseph says.

The Broncos families have also had modest success lobbying provincial and federal governments for changes in the trucking industry: Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Alberta have now introduced mandatory entry-level training to obtain a trucking license.

The garage of Scott and Laurie Thomas's suburban Saskatoon house is a shrine to Evan, strung with jerseys sent by well-wishers from around the country and beyond. Inside, there are photos of Evan everywhere, and memorabilia, and his hockey gear. You can almost feel his presence in the home.

Scott Thomas has a tattoo of Evan's palm on his right forearm, from a print taken the day he saw his son at the funeral home. "Every time I meet somebody new, his hand's right there," he says. He has Evan's high school graduation portrait on his left forearm. He also has Evan's kindergarten handprint, and an image of his daughter holding her brother's hand at the funeral home. Another tattoo features crosses at the crash site.

It has been a tradition for the Thomases to visit the site on the anniversary of the accident in April. There, on the northwest corner of highways 35 and 355, is a makeshift memorial for the victims. Someone has placed sixteen white crosses, emerging from windswept snow, one for each of the dead. Hockey sticks rise from the ground, some draped with faded Broncos jerseys. Full cans of beer have been left for the boys.

During his son's memorial, Thomas said the souls of Evan and his teammates "exploded across the landscape" at the moment of the crash. Saskatchewan's provincial motto is "The Land of Living Skies," and there's perhaps some comfort in Thomas's image—that of a boundless horizon under a vast prairie sky, bright with stars.

> "HAVE YOU EVER KISSED A DEAD BODY BEFORE? I never thought in my life I would be kissing my dead son's eyelids, nose, cheeks, and lips." —Andrea Joseph

Jaskirat Singh Sidhu arriving at the hearing in 2019. "From where I'm standing," he later told *Maclean's* magazine, "forgiveness means everything."

COURTESY SCOTT THOMAS (THOMAS FAMILY). RYAN REMIORZ/THE CANADIAN PRESS/AP (SIDHU).

the stuff *of* summer

Like sunburn or condensation clinging to a cold glass, some things just plain scream *summer.* From a cooler and a camera to swim trunks and sandals, we've pulled together twenty-two of them right here. Take them to the beach. Take them to a party. Or take them as inspiration—and a reminder that the season is short. Enjoy it while you can. PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMIE CHUNG

OPPOSITE, clockwise from top left: Bag by **Prada;** swim trunks by **Orlebar Brown;** shoes by **Manolo Blahnik;** corkscrew folding knife by **Opinel;** bag by **Paul Smith;** bracelets by **Roxanne Assoulin;** wallet by **Loewe;** bottle by **Snow Peak;** Tambour Horizon Light Up connected watch by **Louis Vuitton;** vintage sunglasses by **Persol;** styling cream by **House of Skuff.** **THIS PAGE,** clockwise from top left: Watch by **Triwa;** crochet ball by **Bode;** headlamp by **Third Eye;** chardonnay oil by **Vacation;** sandals by **Loewe;** sweatshirt by **House of Aama;** tank by **Charming Colours;** duffel bag by **Hermès;** speakers by **Bang & Olufsen;** camera by **Polaroid;** cooler by **Yeti.**

PROP STYLING:
ALEX BRANNIAN FOR
ART DEPARTMENT

the FOLLOWER

When he was nineteen, Jeff Gross fell under the sway of the charismatic, fifty-one-year-old Mildred Gordon. She offered him guidance on life, spiritual fulfillment, and sex. With a handful of others, they started Ganas, an "intentional community" on Staten Island. The world's leading cult deprogrammer calls it something else. Jeff spent more than half his life under Mildred's spell. Today he lives in hiding. For the first time, Jeff tells his extraordinary story about life inside Ganas and how he ultimately escaped.

BY DAVID GAUVEY HERBERT
PHOTOGRAPHS BY BENJAMIN RASMUSSEN

18+

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AVAXHOME-

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On the night of May 29, 2006, after seeing the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* in Manhattan, Jeff Gross took the ferry back to Staten Island and walked home to Ganas, a communal-living experiment he'd spent decades building.

He climbed the steep steps up to the group's cluster of houses scattered among leafy walkways and squinted his way through uncut shrubs and poor lighting. As Jeff approached his porch, a figure stepped from the shadows and raised a handgun.

"What do you want?" Jeff shouted, and then, "No, no, don't do it!"

Shots *pop-pop-popped* as the shooter unloaded six rounds into his hip, stomach, arm, and neck. Jeff fell to the ground, blood pumping from his wounds. His assailant stepped over him and fled. A neighbor who heard the shooting knelt beside Jeff and shouted for towels to stanch the bleeding.

Many moments had delivered Jeff to this one. Since 1980, Ganas had been a community that embraced all manner of new-agey life. But his relationship with the group—particularly with its charismatic and often abusive leader, Mildred Gordon—had become unrecognizable since their early days. He'd signed over a small fortune, endured thousands of hours of "feedback" sessions, and entered a four-way marriage. And now he was bleeding out in the back of an ambulance.

How had Jeff gotten into this mess? And why had he stayed?

When we met in October 2021, decades after he hooked up with Mildred, I asked him that very question, only to hear his deeply unsatisfying conclusion. "To me, I know you're writing your story, but I tried to tell you before you ever came out here that, in my opinion, it's just like any situation," he said of his nightmare at Ganas. Families, relationships, jobs, all of them can go bad. "But we're talking about so many people in this situation, it seems even more complex than layered because of our lifestyle."

The lifestyle Jeff and his coresidents lived until he was shot has a lot of names, though he still can't bring himself to use the *c*-word. But America's foremost cult deprogrammer, Rick Alan Ross, described the group during Jeff's time as exactly that. Cults exist on a spectrum, Ross told me. "You have Waco Davidians, Heaven's Gate, Children of God, and then you have groups that are far less destructive," he said. "Jim Jones is a 10; Keith Raniere is a 9." Ross considers Ganas as it existed when Jeff was there to be a 5 or a 6.

Jeff is now sixty-seven. It would be easy to look at his life these days—one in which he lives in hiding, afraid for his life, with a five-inch scar up his belly, lingering PTSD that once left him unable to tell waking life from dreams, and an outstanding $1.3 million judgment against his shooter—and think, *Well, that's what happens when you belong to one of the longest-running cults in New York City.* But the closer I got to Jeff's story, the more I came to see that he and other former members were right: This *was* a more complicated cult story than the ones I thought I knew, and an entirely more unsettling one.

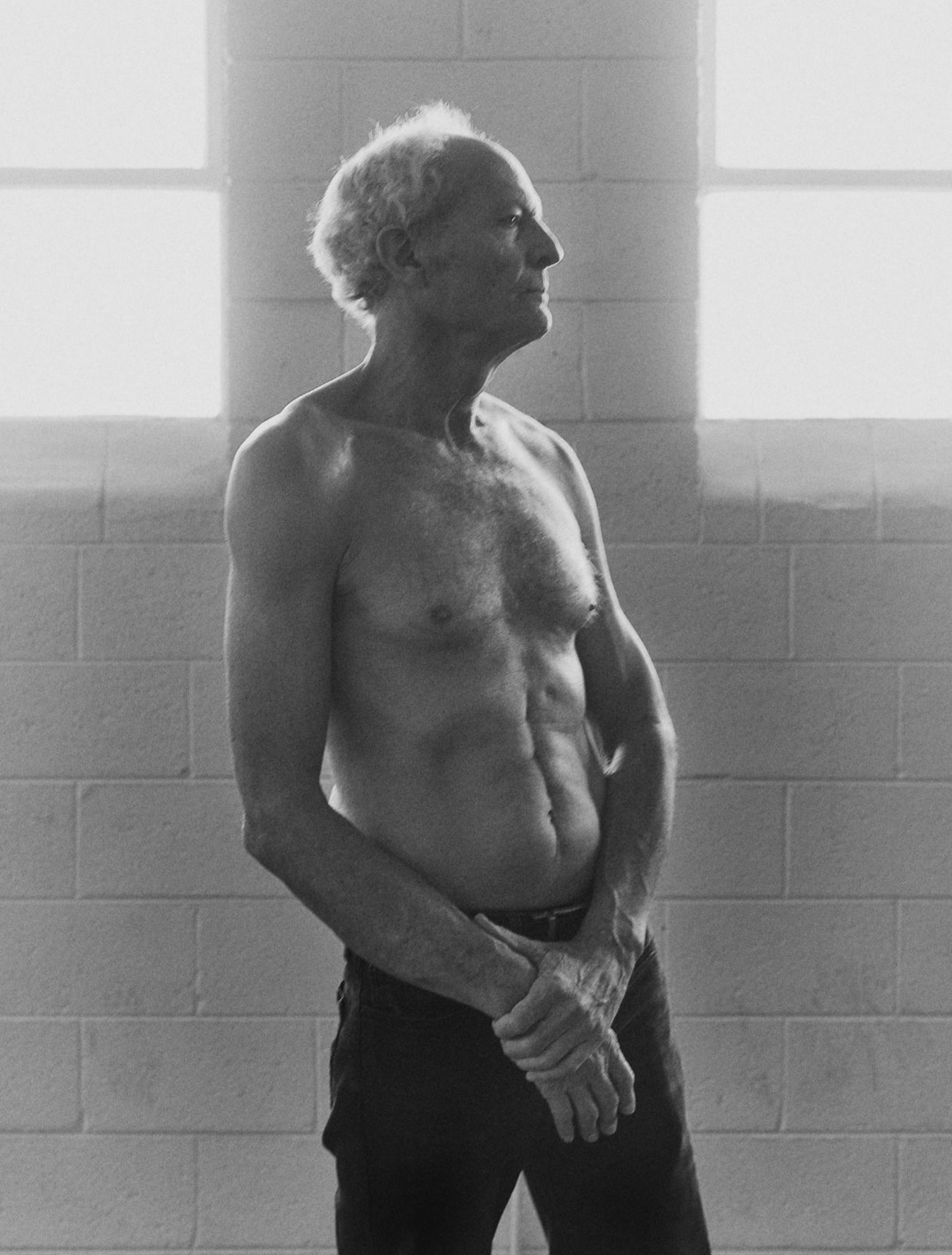
It all started half a century ago, on a hot day when Jeff decided to go to the pool.

At Arizona State in the fall of 1973, everyone seemed to have life figured out except for Jeff Gross. He was nineteen, tall and lanky, with a melon scoop of kinky hair, almost handsome but hopelessly sheltered. It was a party school, and Jeff did not know how to party.

Jeff had grown up in Denver, the likable middle child in a middle-class

Since 1980, as many as one hundred residents have lived at Ganas, just a twenty-minute walk from the Staten Island Ferry but a world away from the city that surrounds it. Opposite: Jeff Gross today.

KATHERINE WOLKOFF/TRUNK ARCHIVE



Jewish home. "Oh, my brother, he was the smart one," he said recently. "I was the one good with people." His parents expected him to get married and take over his dad's auto-parts company. "He may have gotten a message that 'you're going to be part of the family business,' " said David Gross, Jeff's older brother. " 'You're not smart enough to be your own person.' "

But in a small act of rebellion, Jeff set his sights on the deserts of Arizona for college. As a sophomore, he moved into an apartment complex with a pool and a young crowd. His roommate was in school to get a tan, get drunk, and get laid. But Jeff wanted something bigger for his life—not that he could have defined it.

Jeff was a virgin and alone, until one day he decided to go to the pool with the crowd. On the deck, he spotted a tall and lithe brunette. Patty, sixteen, was beautiful, and she'd been shipped out west by her mother and stepfather, who were en route, too, in just a few weeks.

To Jeff's shock, Patty was into him. She soon took his virginity. And the stories she told him! Back in New York, her mother, Mildred Gordon, was a rock star of the so-called human-potential movement—a catchall term for group therapy that ranged from yoga to chanting to hypnosis and silent retreats. Mildred and her husband Ed Smith had run Group Relations Ongoing Workshop, or GROW, out of a brownstone on the Upper West Side.

Jeff didn't know that Mildred was leaving GROW and Manhattan under a cloud—that a year earlier, in 1972, the state attorney general had investigated her and her husband and alleged that they had misrepresented themselves with phony degrees and were running a diploma mill, charging up to $5,000 in fees for certificates not recognized by any state agency.

Soon after she arrived, Mildred invited Jeff over for dinner and guided him in art-therapy sessions. Later, she spotted him flinging a Frisbee and called him a Greek god in her rich Lower East Side accent. "She couldn't believe that we had met," Jeff said. " 'What a miracle,' that was her whole thing."

Meanwhile, Patty moved into Jeff's apartment to get space from Mildred. She was blunt. "Stay away from my mother," she told him one day. But Jeff didn't. "I suddenly had my own personal life expert/mentor/sex counselor to help me," he later wrote in a diary.

After graduation, Jeff followed Mildred to San Francisco. They set up a group apartment on Haight Street, and Jeff escorted her to meet men for sex. She winged for him at bars after Patty dumped him. They began collecting new friends. There was Bruno Krauchthaler, a twenty-year-old Swiss military deserter, handsome and troubled, with a case of agoraphobia and an abusive father. Jorge "George" Caneda was a Spanish dwarf who, as a boy, had perfected the art of playing people off each other in an effort to deflect from his disability. Susan Grossman was a leftist medical student who was still finding herself. (Both George and Susan declined to speak to me.)

Mildred nudged Jeff and Susan together. Mildred and Ed divorced, and she fixated on Bruno, often staying up until 3:00 A.M. talking to him about his life. It was intoxicating, Bruno recalled recently: "*I* wasn't that interested in my life." It wasn't long before they were in bed together.

Jeff worked on a master's degree in social work, and his eventual thesis—a study of the apartment on Haight Street—imagined a vast network of cooperative businesses using "feedback learning," Mildred's proprietary technique of helping her charges effect personal change through constant appraisal of their actions, motives, and character. It was a tricky practice to define—in Jeff's thesis, he spent eight tortured pages trying to explain the method, finally concluding of the process, "Neither the learner, the teacher, or anyone else at this point in time really understand how it happens."

In 1979, Mildred and the group moved to New York City, to an apartment on East Sixth Street. They traveled in a pack and huddled around Mildred as she dispensed wisdom. They were so broke that the five of them would share an ice cream cone. ("Of course, Mildred got the biggest licks," Jeff said.)

They needed more space to grow and looked across the water to an unlikely refuge: the cop-and-firefighter, ruby-red-Republican stronghold of Staten Island.

> THE CLOSER I GOT, THE MORE I REALIZED: *THIS WAS MORE COMPLICATED* THAN MOST CULT STORIES, AND MORE UNSETTLING.

The home at 139 Corson Avenue sat atop a concrete retaining wall, where its height provided a sense of safety. In 1980, a crime wave was ravaging New York City, and Tompkinsville, a working-class neighborhood on the North Shore, wasn't exempt. Here, with the city twinkling in the distance, the group began a new life together. Jeff, Bruno, Susan, and George were all in their twenties, drinking and exploring dreamwork, yoga, hypnosis, and sex. Initially, Mildred was just part of the crew, albeit three decades older and eager to play therapist to her young roommates. But within a few years, she moved to establish order.

A clique called the Core Group, for the most committed members, emerged and heightened the financial stakes of the operation: They pooled their savings and income and made spending decisions by consensus. They opened secondhand-furniture and -clothing businesses to employ the growing flock.

Every morning, Jeff and the other residents, now nearly a dozen strong, met downstairs for breakfast and several hours of feedback learning. "Ultimately, my purpose is to brainwash you," Mildred said to Bruno during a representative taped session. "To change your thinking to my thinking."

In 1982, with Mildred's strong encouragement, Jeff and Susan got married. Jeff's father, elated that his son had married a Jewish doctor, was happy to finance a new home: another house on Corson Avenue for the group for $133,000. As soon as houses nearby went on the market, the group bought those, too, adding ten members with each new home. (Jeff said he would eventually sink more than $400,000 into the group.) The waiting list to join was such that they filled bedrooms as fast as Bruno, in charge of construction, could finish them.

"There was a magical feeling between us," Jeff later wrote in his diary of those boom years. "The weird chemistry of the emerging, forested enclave on a Staten Island hillside with Manhattan off in the distance, and us, a group coming together to construct its own world."

In 1986, Mildred, Bruno, Susan, and Jeff drove Mildred's convertible north to a conference in Ontario for "intentional communities," the term they were using for their cohabitational experiment. There Mildred met Rebekah "Becky" Johnson, twenty-three, awkward and shy, and invited her to join them at Ganas, the name they'd chosen for the group, from the Spanish word for *desire*. Jeff had a bad feeling immediately—a sense that Becky might not be able to withstand feedback learning. But Mildred insisted.

Ganas's constructed world was growing fast, and members were clear about their reasons for joining: a novel sense of community, personal growth, and lots of sex. Videotape from this era shows Ganasians, young and hopeful, skin packed with collagen, joking with one another at the ferry terminal and talking by candlelight late at night. Ganasians carried around "problem books" in which to record daily events and their reactions to them. The booklets came with a twenty-three-page instruction manual that outlined the baroque codes to be used: *de* for defensive, *cl* for clitoris, *MSdp* for dire predictions of doom, and so on. Bruno sometimes blazed through ten a month. (*Impotence* and *sad* appeared regularly in his "emotions" column.)

Mildred coached members on foreplay and taught tricks for maintaining

erections. She pushed reluctant members into bed, reasoning that having sex with someone you weren't attracted to could be a learning experience. Bruno alone was consigned to monogamy; Mildred forbade him from sleeping with anyone but her. Intercourse was mostly vanilla. The edgiest practice was just how openly everyone talked about crushes, performance issues, and jealousies at morning planning sessions.

Mildred's theories about sexual freedom could turn dark in practice. She pressured Alfonso, a Spanish graduate student in his early thirties, who asked to be identified only by his first name, into sleeping with new member Becky, whom she viewed as young and inexperienced. He now regrets doing so. "It was very difficult to say no, let's put it that way," Alfonso said recently. "[Mildred] had a lot of control over the whole situation." Soon after, Becky seemed to sour on life at Ganas. The group eventually asked her to leave.

Work wasn't all it was cracked up to be, either. The group dreamed its secondhand stores could be laboratories for cooperative work. But employees were discouraged from talking—except to track customers over an intercom. Neighbors gossiped about the creepy PA system. The stores' primary accomplishment was keeping everyone busy and bone-tired.

And while sex was encouraged, children were out of the question. Susan longed for a baby, but Mildred discouraged her. "Mildred's point was: Our baby is this," Jeff said, referring to Ganas.

But as others' enthusiasm for the circumscribed life on Corson Avenue dimmed, Jeff just wanted more Mildred. He followed her around with a clipboard, taking up a detailed collection of his own shortcomings as she saw them, waiting for a personal breakthrough that always seemed close. He wrote in his problem books and filled his hours with chores Mildred asked of him, including regular foot massages.

Jeff looked forward to his birthday. Every year, he was given an entire day—sometimes two!—of feedback. The group would gather for brunch, turn on a video camera, and spend hours dissecting what exactly was wrong with him. It was the same year after year: The group found Jeff beyond repair, and then, toward the end of the marathon session, Mildred would suddenly find a glimmer of hope. "It's sort of like a puppy looking forward to the treat," Bruno said of Jeff and his birthdays. "And what he got was the same routine." Every year, Jeff filed away the VHS tape of his grilling as a keepsake.

In 1989, Jorge Calvo, another Spaniard, whom George had recruited, announced he was leaving after nearly a decade at Ganas. "Everybody freaked out," he said recently from his home in Spain. "I was the Antichrist in just one dinner."

Alfonso realized that he, too, was feeling "less and less of a person, less and less capable to think" and wanted out. He moved in with Jorge in Manhattan after taking a measly $25,000 from the Core Group for eight years of work and sweat equity in Ganas. The pair visited museums and went barhopping before returning to Spain for good. "I think I saw more of Manhattan and New York in the last two months," Alfonso said, "than in the rest of the eight years."

In the summer of 1995, dozens of Ganasians sat in the backyard on Corson Avenue, waiting for a wedding to begin. Of the two grooms, Jeff was the more nervous. He sat stiffly in a plastic chair, wearing a too-tight tuxedo, skimming the vows he would say in a few minutes. Mildred had written parts of them, in preparation for Jeff's four-way marriage ceremony to Susan and two other members, another idea of hers.

Jeff was forty years old by then, and his springy hair had receded. His face was becoming drawn. He had no children, no career to speak of. He hadn't even really chosen his partners that day. He no longer had endless years ahead, but at least he had this.

The foursome took turns reading their vows. When it was Jeff's turn, he choked out, in a halting cadence, "Marriage is a sexual contract into the foreseeable future," completely unable to envision his.

Life at Ganas was making Jeff increasingly miserable. He'd once loved feedback sessions, alive with the feeling that all this could turn him into a greater version of himself, but they had somehow done the opposite. Lately, Mildred belittled him, calling Jeff a wannabe alpha male. He wrote to her, complaining that he wasn't making progress. "I don't really know how to reassure you," she replied in a fourteen-page letter. "Anyway maybe you are right, and I am doing damage to you."

There comes a moment in every story like Jeff's when a door appears, one the protagonist could walk through, but his feet don't move. For Jeff, there were two.

The first out came when he began to consider that life in the world he'd left behind decades earlier might have some answers. In the early 1990s, he started a street festival near the ferry terminal, and it was a minor hit. But he could never fully separate the work from Ganas; when a Staten Island business group wanted to honor Jeff for his civic efforts, Mildred suggested he deliver a rambling speech at the luncheon, denouncing capitalism. "Like a fool I went along with it," he said. The Core Group eventually convinced him to quit working on the festival entirely.

The second came in the form of Jeff's brother, David.

The Gross family was determined to hang on to a semblance of a relationship with Jeff. In September 1996, David asked Jeff to take a road trip from Boston to Shreveport, where he was now a molecular-biology professor at Louisiana State. On the drive, David pressed Jeff to at least consider having children. "For hours and hours I would try to convince him that he was missing out on something very important," David told me. (Jeff remembered this differently: He really did want kids, he said, but Mildred's constant harping on his obsession with being an "alpha male" convinced Susan he would be an unfit father.)

But the group had prepped Jeff, advising him to be wary of advice from his overbearing older sibling. It worked. "It was clear he was so brainwashed and mesmerized by Mildred and others who were running the show there," David said. "It was like talking to a brick wall." Other times, when David visited Ganas, members descended on him with their trademark style of interrogation, berating him about bullying Jeff when they were kids.

Life at Ganas got bleaker. Every morning, from a massive easy

From left: Jeff, Mildred, and Bruno at 139 Corson Ave in 1981.

COURTESY BRUNO KRAUCHTHALER

chair, Mildred increasingly focused on Jeff and Bruno. Jeff mumbled "right" and "okay" as other Ganasians, enjoying their cereal, looked on.

Ganas was attracting more individuals simply looking for free therapy. In 1994, Becky Johnson, the ex-member Jeff had been suspicious about from the start, begged Ganas to allow her to return. Jeff and others objected, but Mildred overruled them. (Becky's tenure didn't last long. City marshals evicted her two years later after she failed to pay rent.) Jeff opposed another applicant, a middle-aged veteran. Mildred overruled him again. The new resident was later found in a Ganas kitchen defecating in a blender.

Mildred forbade Bruno from reading. He once bought an introduction-to-macroeconomics textbook, and Susan screamed at him until he returned it. But for Bruno, it was a turning point. He photocopied books at the library on his lunch break and hid the pages in his toolbox. "One thing education does is it lets you see options, and I didn't see options," he said recently. "I was literally trapped in this view of the world."

By the late 1990s, Bruno wanted to leave Mildred. Their relationship had been on the slide for years. Bruno alleged that Mildred once tried to hit him—and when he dodged her smacks, she wailed that the strain of swinging and missing could very well kill her. At night, he withheld sex until she agreed to watch VHS tapes of their feedback sessions and admit that she was increasingly dominating the group.

Part of what kept him from leaving was money: Ganas had all of his. Bruno was owed hundreds of thousands of dollars, based on the group's own formula, established after the Spaniards' messy exit. He feared that if he left too suddenly, he'd end up with nothing.

"Nobody *really* changed," Bruno said. "Nothing *really* happened. It was like a nightmare."

As the new

millennium approached, the past came back to haunt Ganas. In 1999, Becky, now twice booted from Ganas, sued the group for $3 million. Her lawsuit called feedback learning an "unrecognized, unorthodox method of behavior modification that employs deceptive, coercive, and dangerous manipulative techniques similar to brainwashing." She alleged that Mildred emotionally abused her and that she'd been raped. (She later dropped the suit.)

Bruno and Mildred separated, and she prohibited anyone at Ganas from sleeping with him until she had a new partner. Within months, she was pressuring Dave Greenson, a young Brown grad with a lush head of hair, with the same guilt trips she'd used on Bruno two decades earlier. "You can't believe how happy I was," said Bruno, who was now free to walk away. "And sad for David."

Around 2001, Dave and Mildred married, despite their forty-six-year age difference, and they decamped to a Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, apartment purchased by the Core Group. Mildred drew a $40,000 salary from Ganas and returned several times a week to run feedback sessions.

But without her omnipresence, Ganas changed. "When a cult leader dies or retires, like Mildred did when she removed herself . . . then the group has to recalibrate," said Rick Alan Ross, the cult expert.

Indeed, with Mildred gone, the original members of the Core Group began snapping out of the trance they'd been in and grabbing what they wanted from life. Bruno took a six-figure payout, toured Europe, and moved upstate. Susan traveled to Kazakhstan to adopt a child, years after Mildred had convinced her not to have one. And then there was George. He had always set himself apart from the group, resisting Mildred's pull. He set up a shadow group in another house and quietly tended the books. George borrowed $175,000 from the Core Group to buy a home in Spain; the group also gave a five-figure loan to George's sister for another property purchase.

Top: George Caneda, at home circa 2006. Bottom: Becky Johnson appeared on episodes of *America's Most Wanted* in 2006 and 2007.

Even Jeff branched out, launching a new street festival. He thought he might be ready to leave—he was dating a new woman outside Ganas, enjoying his project, and thinking about starting a family. But after thirty years with Mildred, Jeff was bad with money, and even now, as he expanded his horizons, he couldn't see much farther than the ferry terminal.

Then one afternoon in 2004, as Jeff announced a musical act onstage, he heard a voice in the crowd call out, "Hey, Jeff!"

"I thought it was a bag lady," he told me. "Then she took my picture."

Over a quarter

century, thousands of people had passed through Ganas as renters, short-term visitors, and dinner guests. In the blur of feedback sessions, hard work, and sleep deprivation, many of those names faded into obscurity. In Jeff's mind, Becky Johnson, the troubled, twice-evicted tenant, was one of those forgotten faces. Until she wasn't.

It started with the photo at the waterfront. Then, on Thanksgiving Day, big blue letters appeared in graffiti on the compound's retaining wall: RAPIST + PIMP = JEFF GROSS.

A few weeks later, Jeff was jogging home from the gym when he realized a car was following him. It crept alongside him for a few blocks, then sped ahead. Out jumped Becky wielding a silver object. Jeff thrust his hands out, thinking it was a knife. It was a camera, which captured a photo of Jeff looking oddly menacing.

Flyers with that photo began appearing in Tompkinsville: "He is a CAREER RAPIST and a PIMP . . . DO YOU WANT THIS CREEP IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?" Becky was soon publishing a website with similar sentiments.

Jeff was confused. Becky had named him in her civil suit five years ear-

KATHERINE WOLKOFF/TRUNK ARCHIVE (GEORGE)

lier—she alleged that he stood outside her door while a Bulgarian tenant raped her, allegations Jeff categorically denied. But Mildred and Julie Greve, George's wife, had been the main targets of that legal action.

(Becky did have some legitimate gripes with Mildred, who had promised attention and care and held herself out as a therapist despite not being licensed. Becky later sought evaluations from three separate mental-health providers in the late 1990s. She did not respond to my request for comment.)

Rattled, Jeff obtained a restraining order. But the Core Group seemed unconcerned. He suspected Becky was reading Ganas's online newsletter, a potpourri of birthday announcements, poetry, and light admonishments. ("Are you a net turner-on-er of lights, or a net turner-off-er?") But when he asked them to remove details of his personal schedule, they declined.

HOW DIFFERENT WAS JEFF FROM MEN WHO WALK AROUND WONDERING *WHERE THEIR LIVES WENT?*

Jeff requested a few security measures at Ganas, including better lighting around the homes. In an August 2005 email from Spain, George refused, adding in a postscript that there was a landline phone by his pool, should anyone need to reach him. Some Ganasians *tut-tutted,* telling Jeff that he was not only overreacting but actually proving the point that Mildred had made about him for a quarter century: He was too concerned about other people's opinions.

The obvious thing to do would be to get the hell out. Today, Jeff says the Core Group's refusal to buy him out is why he didn't leave. But there was another reason, too. The way Jeff tried to leave was the same way he had stayed, by talking in endless circles, as if he needed their permission. He wanted the group's feedback on his plan, even though feedback was part of what he wanted to escape.

Then came the night he was shot.

In the ambulance on the way to the hospital, as EMTs worked to stop the bleeding, Jeff identified his shooter: Becky. From a bed in the ICU, he laughed at the tabloid headlines—DIPPY HIPPIE BANG BANG, screamed the *Daily News* front page—but his euphoria was short-lived. Police advised him to stay away from Ganas, as Becky was still on the lam. After a three-week hospital stay, he decided to fly home to Denver and the family he'd distanced himself from for decades. He felt ashamed. "My condition confirmed all of my family's fears about what I had been doing," he said.

Jeff moved in with his mother and endured grueling physical-therapy sessions so intense that he once woke up in an emergency room after suffering a bout of transient global amnesia. A high school classmate took him to a range and taught him how to shoot. He bought two handguns.

America's Most Wanted aired multiple episodes about the shooting. Jeff published a letter in the *Daily News,* imploring Becky to "put an end to this nightmare." He hired a private investigator to help kick-start the NYPD's manhunt for her. That summer, Julie Greve was at home when Becky called, read out a bank account number, and demanded $1 million in cash.

In June 2007, Becky was arrested in Philadelphia after registering a car in her own name. At her apartment, police found an AK-47, one thousand rounds of ammunition, hair dye, eleven license plates, and bullet-riddled human-silhouette shooting targets.

Jeff wanted to hire a lawyer to pressure the district attorney to go to trial rather than cut a plea deal with less potential prison time for Becky. But when he wrote to the Core Group asking for help, they were cool on the idea of spending more money. Mildred herself felt no responsibility: "I guess, if anyone could be to blame, it would be me, both for taking her in, and then for kicking her out," she wrote to Jeff. "But I don't feel guilty. I tried to help her and failed."

Jeff discovered that his name was on a little-used Ganas credit card, and he took a cash advance to hire a lawyer, who lobbied the district attorney. For her part, Becky hired a shrewd local attorney who presented a simple defense: Becky didn't pull the trigger—but if she did, Jeff and his parasitic cult of ex-hippies and sex weirdos deserved it.

Jeff had been letting other people make decisions for him for decades, and to terrible effect. Now, with his physical safety in the hands of a jury, it was fitting that the streak continued. After deliberating for four and a half hours, a Staten Island jury acquitted Becky of all charges.

Jeff limped away from the scene. "I'm stunned," he said to a reporter. "That's about it."

Now that he was functionally kicked out of the Core Group, Jeff decided to start looking out for Jeff. In 2008, he sued for his share of Ganas's assets, and then filed a second suit alleging that they had failed to implement security measures before the shooting. His estranged wife Susan and the rest of the Core Group, his so-called self-selected family for a quarter century, stopped speaking to him.

Jeff also sued Becky in civil court. A lawyer friend warned that he would likely never see a dime, but he pressed on. Compelling Ganas members to be deposed felt like an act of accountability for the whole group. "In my mind it's: You got to face the music," he said recently. Jeff and the group eventually settled for an undisclosed amount. In 2014, a jury ruled against Becky and awarded him $1.3 million in damages. (He has received no money to date.)

A year later, in an unrelated case, Missouri police arrested Becky for stalking a former classmate.

It surprised me to learn that Jeff loves documentaries about cults. When I told him I'd spoken to Rick Alan Ross, he got excited. He was game to go through a checklist Ross has developed to identify the hallmarks of a cult: an authoritarian leader with no meaningful accountability; a process of indoctrination; and financial, sexual, or other exploitation of group members. Jeff agreed that Ganas had checked all those boxes during the years he lived there, but he couldn't bring himself to say he had *been in a cult*. He insisted that what had happened to him happens to plenty of people. Sure, maybe his life had some of the trappings of the glossy cult docs he likes to watch. But how different, really, was he from the men who walk around every day, stuck in jobs, friendships, and marriages going nowhere, afraid to leave, afraid to stay, wondering where their lives went?

We love cult stories in part because they offer reassurance: *Who would be stupid enough to get involved with all that? Not you*. In the TV version of Jeff's story, he would leave Ganas to take control of his destiny. Mildred's spell now broken, we would welcome this pitiable creature back into the fold. Peppy music, roll credits.

But Jeff's break wasn't clean. In fact, it was hardly a break at all. Through the lawsuits and recriminations, he never really stopped talking to Mildred. They exchanged letters, and Jeff visited her Brighton Beach apartment for dinner. He wanted the woman who had sent his life careening off course to explain how he could get it back on track. "I still think maybe I was trying to make some sense of things, holding on to the belief still that she . . . would

shed some light on things that I was struggling with," he said recently.

Mildred eventually moved back into the Ganas compound, where she slipped into dementia, and died, in January 2015, at the age of ninety-two. Her memorial was at the Bowery Poetry Club; more than two hundred Ganasians and friends from her GROW days showed up to celebrate her life. Jeff desperately wanted to go to the funeral, but he stayed home—Dave, her widower, had cautioned against it, insisting there was too much bad blood. But Bruno did attend. He remembered just one person that day who said anything negative about Mildred: her daughter Patty, who had warned Jeff about her mother all those years ago.

After Mildred's death, Jeff yearned to make sense of his time at Ganas, but Susan, George, and the rest of the Core Group refused to speak to him. Instead, he reached out to former members.

Jeff noticed a pattern. Men whose confidence Mildred picked apart had actually done quite well for themselves outside Ganas's walls. Jorge Calvo has a thriving career in film postproduction and is married with two daughters. Alfonso recently retired as an executive with a Spanish oil company and is also married, with three daughters of his own. Bruno is working on a bachelor's degree and sells his paintings through Saatchi. He's married, too. As a rule, the sooner they left, the better off they ended up.

Other former members are eager to downplay their involvement. Dave Greenson runs an anti-racism consulting firm and declined to speak on the record. George Caneda declined to comment, too. He lives in Spain, where he tweets about cryptocurrency and his skepticism of the efficacy of vaccines and Covid mandates.

Susan Grossman now leads Ganas, and she hosts regular informational sessions for prospective members, holding them via Zoom since the pandemic started. In December 2021, she tersely ejected a reporter from the meeting.

One former member who declined to speak on the record cautioned me: The keyhole through which you view this story wildly affects the telling. Some ex-members had a wonderful time on Corson Avenue. And many of those who fled Ganas have since made new, rich lives. Cults, like society at large, dole out joy and misery in unequal servings, both during the party and afterward.

Which brings us to Jeff. These days, he loves taking his nieces and nephews on hiking trips and deeply regrets not having kids of his own. His bullet-riddled left arm still aches in the cold.

"I would say Mildred is the worst thing that ever happened to Jeff," said Bruno, who is still in touch with him. "He needed a normal life."

Jeff remains baffled by his own life story. He often leans on bromides. He'd forgiven Mildred and Becky, he said, and "now I need to forgive myself." He told me that "cultlike things" had happened to him, a phrase he'd clearly been workshopping in his head to make sense of those years on Corson Avenue. He was trapped in the circular analysis of his condition that he'd been using since the days of Mildred's problem books.

As we got to know each other, he often wanted *me* to explain what the hell had happened to him. "I don't know, you tell me!" was his refrain.

So I told Jeff what I saw. After all these years, couldn't he see that he might have been taken for a ride? That Mildred wasn't all that wise, that perhaps she was just a washed-up Svengali who found him in the Arizona desert: the first recruit for her second act. But he couldn't condemn her; he even wondered if she was a victim herself.

"There had to be some kind of virus going around that space that infected all of us, including Mildred," Jeff said. "Maybe she was the spreader of it, but she got infected somehow. Right? I don't know." After a relationship with her that spanned more than four decades, "I don't know" was the best he could muster.

When we parted ways on the sidewalk, I turned back just in time to see Jeff disappear into the cold night air. I felt a twinge in my stomach that felt like hunger and then sank into a nervous energy.

At a nearby sports bar, I started typing up my notes. The room hummed with the white noise of commercials and banter that soothes the quiet desperation of men. Floating on the aroma of draft beer was the sour truth: I'd been desperate to convince Jeff that he'd joined a cult, as if naming it would lend respectability to the thwarted lives of men who had not joined one. He had played along and accidentally revealed something far darker: His whole life, he'd been locked in a prison of self-doubt and indecision. Mildred hadn't put him there. She'd merely taken away the keys. What separated Jeff from the man who won't leave a bad marriage or a soul-killing job was the bad luck to have met her. He was still sitting in that cell, waiting to be let out by a warden who was never coming back.

But there was a lockpick. Jeff had tucked it up his sleeve so many years ago he'd forgotten it was there. Deep in his master's thesis, that naive blueprint for the ruinous three decades of his life that would follow, was a quote he'd lifted from the essayist Wendell Berry: "We have come, or we are coming fast, to the end of what we were given. The good possibilities that may lie ahead are only those that we will make ourselves, by a wiser and more generous and more exacting use of what we have left."

Jeff Gross could keep processing the past. Or he could stop talking and start searching. The last real choice he made was to go to the pool in 1973. Wherever that nineteen-year-old was, Jeff needed to find him, stare into those pale, virgin eyes, and tell him what to do next.

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Humidity

HUMOR US, WON'T YOU, and finish the following sentence: It's not the heat; it's the ___.

You've probably heard the saying so many times you don't even remember learning it. But now that you think about it . . . it seems a little fishy, no? Why do we regurgitate a saying that contains zero universal wisdom? This isn't some old chestnut like "Practice makes perfect." It's an oddly specific idiom that claims 95 degrees in a dry climate is comfortable but 95 degrees in a wet climate is lethal.

Humidity isn't the problem; it's the answer. To all of our problems–from dry skin to a dry spell. It makes everything more gorgeous, even you! It's why spas have steam rooms and why beautiful people always seem to be in them. Without humidity, a sauna is just a wooden box, no better than a casket. But throw some water on that pile of hot rocks in the corner and what do you get? Rejuvenation.

Humidity is an aphrodisiac. Miami, Havana, São Paulo–it's no coincidence that the sexiest places on earth are also the most humid. You know where isn't sexy? Reno, Phoenix, Provo. "But what about California?" you want to know. "California is sexy!" Maybe, but California is currently on fire, possibly as punishment for trying to pull off a lush, seaside look despite its desert origins. "New York City is humid, and it isn't sexy!" you insist. Touché. New York City is disgusting, but let's not blame humidity for the municipal waste department's doing. New York City isn't disgusting because it's humid; it's disgusting because it's disgusting.

If you have a problem with humidity, you aren't embracing it. Yes, it can make you feel sleepy, sweaty, and crazy, but there are solutions. Handled properly, humidity is an entirely legitimate excuse to be drunk and/or asleep all day. Feeling sluggish? Take a nap! Getting sweaty inside a stiff suit? Throw on a breezy Tommy Bahama. ("Hot" and "humid" are the only conditions in which you can stroll down the street in a half-buttoned shirt with parrots on it and not immediately be arrested.) Feeling looser than Matthew McConaughey on a Florida vacation? May we suggest day drinking? Piña coladas pair perfectly with high dew points.

Come August, when temperatures are soaring past 100 degrees, you won't care if the air is moist or not. All you will feel is the sun roasting you like a rotisserie chicken. At least humidity holds the promise of a nearby body of water. If you were stranded naked in the desert, an arid wind whipping an ant farm's worth of sand into your butt crack, you know what might feel nice? A little humidity! There's a reason nobody has nightmares about getting lost in a rain forest.

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